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BOSTON UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Thesis

THE SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY OF VACHEL LINDSAY, CARL SANDBURG AND EDGAR LEE MASTERS

by

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submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
1942



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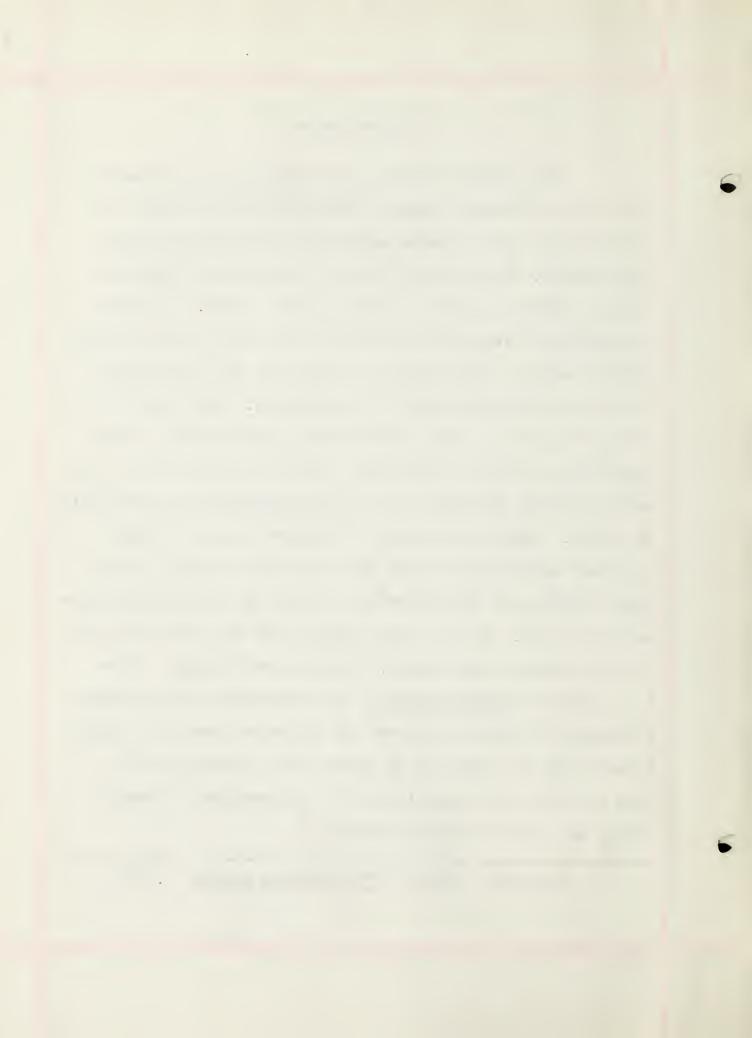
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Introduction

The motive for this particular piece of research stems from a two-fold source: a genuine love of poetry for itself alone, and a sincere interest in problems of social significance. The marriage of these two factors pointed the vay to a study of poetry of sociological import. It is not my purpose to discuss the poetry from the aesthetic and appreciative point of view, but as a comment on and criticism of the life of the period which it represents. There will be no attempt to prove, on the one hand that poetry void of social significance fails as literature, nor on the other hand, that poetry teeming with the dogma of the passionate reformer fails as poetry. Indeed the writer is inclined to agree with a prominent author and teacher who maintains that two of the great services of literature are to help us to understand life and to feel it. It is in this spirit that the poems included in this research are studied. "Literary criticism" writes F. R. Leavis in Determinations, "is concerned with more than literature. A serious interest in literature cannot be merely literary. It is likely to be drawn from a perception of what must be a preoccupation with - the problems of social equity and order and social health".

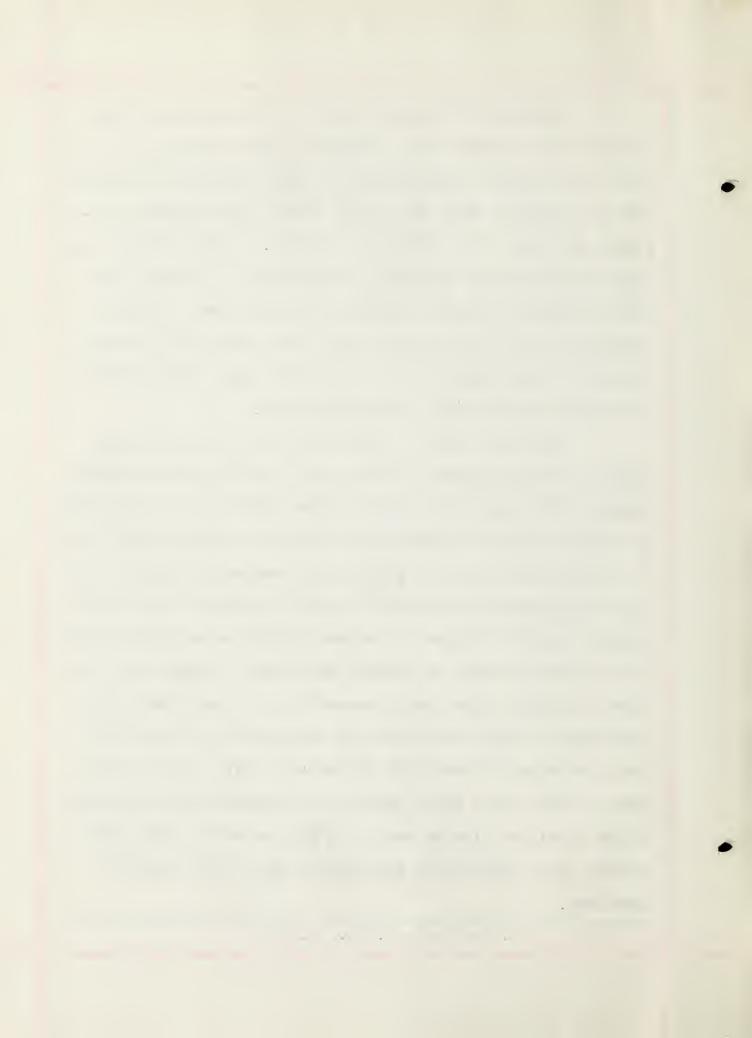
^{1.} Halford E. Luccock, The American Mirror, p.113



Although the reader may feel, with other critics, that in the instances where propaganda rises highest, poetic level falls lowest, and although he may fear that "if literature is forced to wear the clothes of her loud sister propaganda, she would soon lose her identity", still he may also agree with Archibald MacLeish when he says that poetry is a living thing, no longer defending its existence, but challenging to look at the actual world, and saying that poetry is native to the actual world, and being aware that the current crisis must be met, not escaped from.

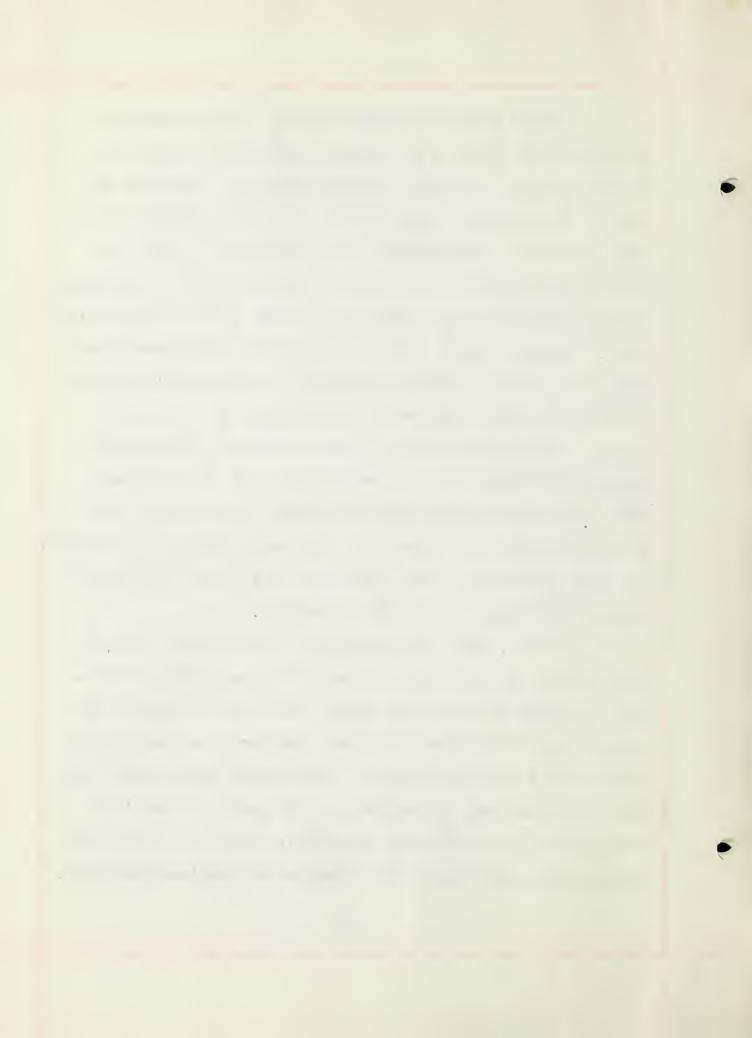
This new note of social import in poetry had been sounded by Edwin Markham in the latter part of the nineteenth century. "The Man with the Hoe" placed itself in the vanguard of this new type of poetry when it dared to examine the lot of the working man, dared to picture the laborer carrying on his back the "curden of the world," "dead to rapture and despair." Markham raised his voice in protest against an economic system which looked upon man as nothing more than a machine and upon labor as nothing more than a commodity. He envisioned a social order in which every man was entitled not merely to a living wage and the material comforts of life, but to a full share in the things which beautify and ennoble life and develop the spiritual side of man — a social order of which Walt Whitman, most American of Americans, sang in his poems of democracy.

^{2.} Luccock, op.cit., p.153



Edwin Markham and Walt Whitman raised questions which Democracy has not yet answered and they cast into the tranquil pool of American literature stones of question and doubt. The widening ripples spread. A half a century later three new poets - American to their fingertips in mood, in spirit, and in expression - took up the challenge of democracy trumpeted by Whitman and added their notes to the everswelling paean. Nicholas Vachel Lindsay, revivalist turned socialist: Edgar Lee Masters, candid photographer of democracy's sordid failures; and Carl Sandburg, lyric champion of the working masses - these three vibrant, widely-differing personalties, products of widely-differing environment, all experienced their Americanism; they lived the gospel they preached, and though each may have sounded his note on a different instrument the theme of the lyric was essentially the same - the theme of Whitman - the plea for a soul for America.

It is, then, the intention of this study, after a brief social and historical survey of the period from 1900 - 1930, to trace the effect of these social and historical influences upon the works of Lindsay, Sandburg, and Masters; to examine the social philosophy of these poets whose ideas first found voice and rose to heights in this period of American development; and to discover the ideals which fired the torch handed on by these men to the champions of American democracy.

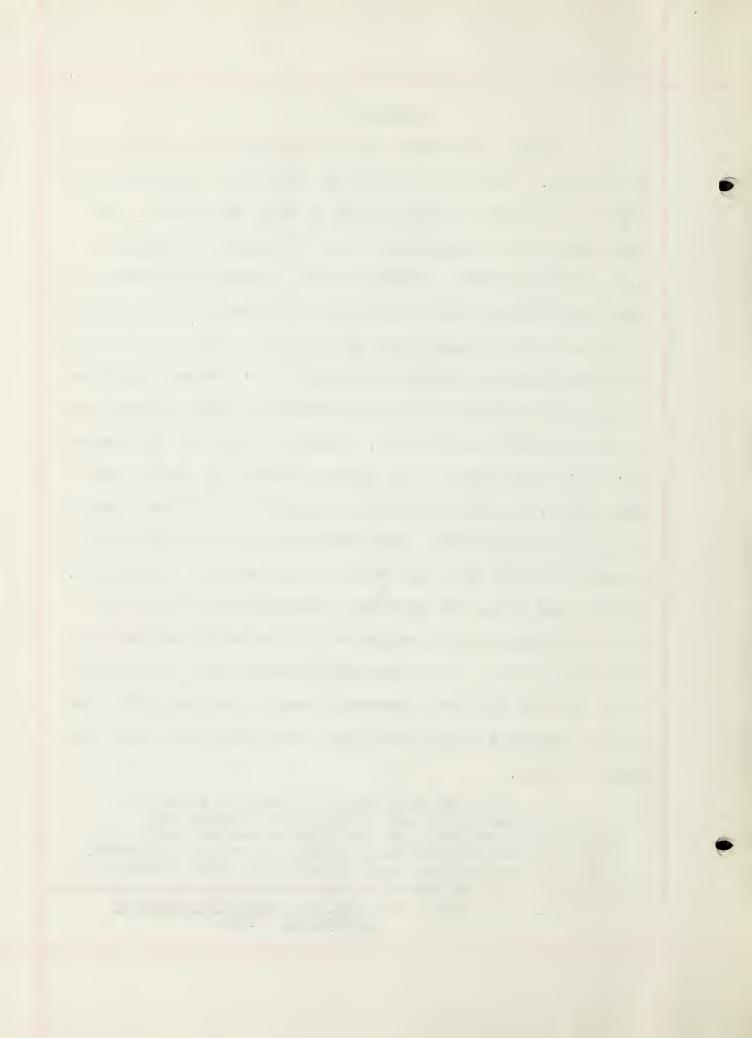


Chapter I

Poets, as someone has aptly suggested, do not write in a vacuum. They are a product of their environment and are conditioned by the time and place in which they write. The role played by environment is really two-fold, according to V. F. Calverton: "The literary artist, although he derives his ideas and direction from the social environment, is, in turn, by virtue of those same ideas and direction, able to assist in the transformation of that environment." 1. Let us, therefore, consider some of the leading environmental forces playing upon the poets under consideration. Lindsay, Sandburg, and Masters, born within ten years of one another during the period 1869 -1879, wrote, in their ascendancy, during two important periods in American development - the period from 1912 to 1920, including the World War, and the post-war period of the 1920's. Further than this, the lives and personalities of these men were conditioned by the influences of the latter part of the nineteenth century, just following the Civil War. It is well for us to step back for a moment, then, to the year 1870, and to look through the eyes of Vernon Louis Parrington upon the American scene.

The pot was boiling briskly in America in the tumultuous post-war years. The country had definitely entered upon its freedom and was settling its disordered household to suit its democratic taste. Every where new ways were feverishly at work transform-

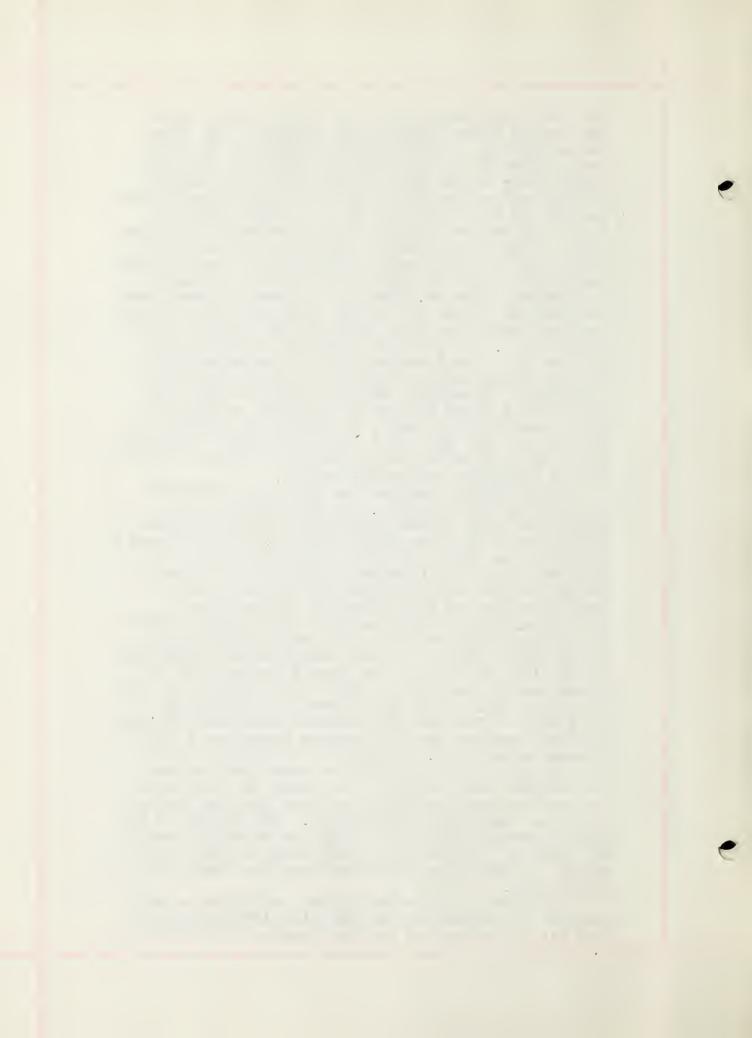
^{1.} V. F. Calverton, The Liberation of American Literature, p. 468



ing the countryside. In the South another order was rising uncertainly on the ruins of the plantation system; in the East an expanding factory economy was weaving a different pattern of industrial life; in the Middle Border a recrudescent agriculture was arising from the application of the machine to the rich prairie soil. All over the land a spider web of iron rails was being spun that was to draw the remotest outposts into the common whole and bind the nation together with steel bands. Mevertheless two diverse worlds lay on the map of continental America. Facing in opposite directions and holding different faiths, they would not travel together easily or take comfort from the yoke that joined them. Agricultural America, behind which lay two and a half centuries of experience, was a decentralized world, democratic, individualistic, suspicious; industrial America, behind which lay only half a dozen decades of bustling experiment, was a centralizing world, capitalistic, feudal, ambitious. The one was a decaying order, the other a rising, and between them would be friction till one or the other had become master.

Continental America was still half frontier and half settled country. A thin line of homesteads had been thrust westward till the outposts reached well into the Middle Border. Behind these outposts was still much unoccupied land, and beyond stretched the unfenced prairies, till they merged in the sagebrush plains, gray and waste, that stretched to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Beyond the mountains were other stretches of plains and deserts, vast and forbidding in their alkali blight, to the wooded coast ranges and the Pacific Ocean .--- The urgent business of the times was the subduing of this wild region, --- and the forty years that lay between the California Gold rush of '49 and the Oklahoma Land Rush of '89 saw the greatest wave of pioneer expansion in all pioneer experience. Expansion on so vast a scale necessitated building, and the seventies became the railway age, bonding the future to break down present barriers of isolation, and opening new territories for later exploitation. The reflux of the great movement swept back upon the Atlantic coast and gave to life there a fresh note of spontaneous vigor, of which the Gilded Age was the inevitable expression.

It was this energetic East, with its accumulations of liquid capital awaiting investment and its factories turning out the materials needed to



push the settlements westwards, that profited most from the conquest of the far West. The impulsion from the frontier did much to drive forward the industrial revolution. The bankers had come into control of the liquid wealth of the nation, and the industrialists had learned to use the machine for production; the time was ripe for exploitation on a scale undreamed-of a generation before.

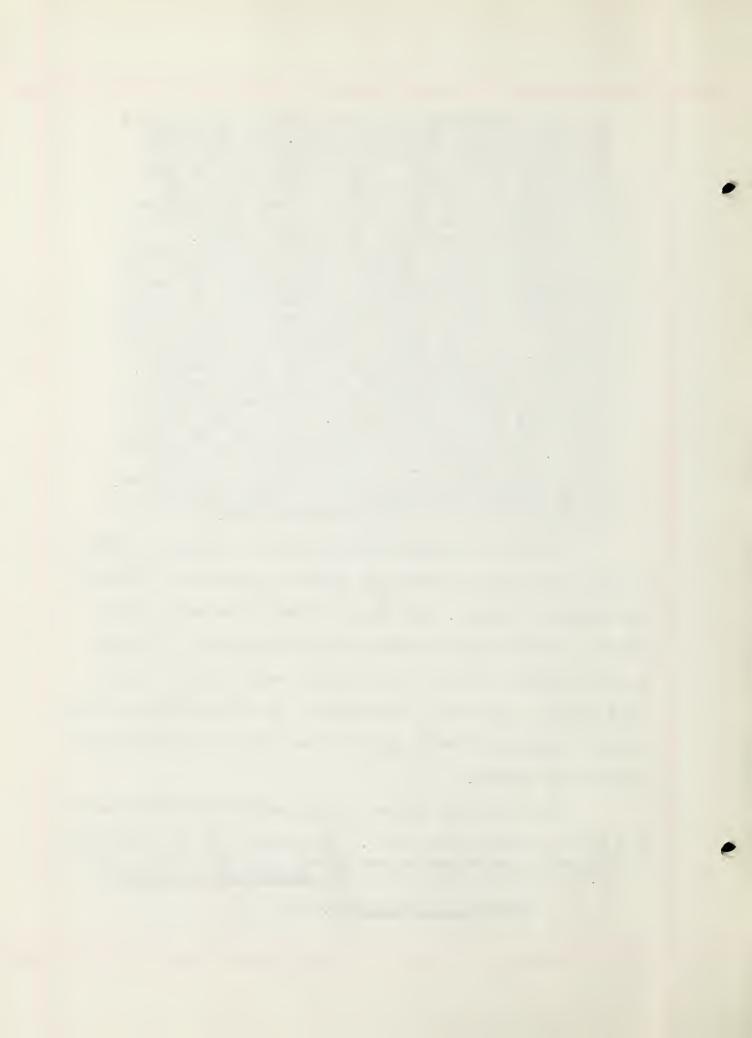
"This bustling America of 1870 accounted itself a democratic world. A free people had put away all aristocratic privileges and conscious of its power went forth to possess the last frontier. Its social philosophy, which it found adequate to its needs was summed up in three words - preemption, exploitation, progress. Its immediate and pressing business was to dispossess the government of its rich holdings. Lands in the possession of the government were so much idle waste, untaxed and profitless; in private hands they would be developed. They would provide work, pay taxes, support schools, enrich the community. Preemption meant exploitation and exploitation meant progress. It was a simple philosophy and it suited the simple individualism of the times. The Gilded Age knew nothing of the Enlightenment; it recognized only the acquisitive instinct."

Between the panic of 1873 and the campaign of 1896, however, the voice of democracy began to question the growing plutocracy of America. Something seemed to be wrong with a progress that increased poverty as well as wealth. The old agrarian America, coming into conflict with the new capitalistic America, as it did, for example, in the election of 1896, raised a question of deals and purposes which stimulated controversy and debate.

It was in the period of the seventies that cultured good taste reached a low point. The dignity of the eighteenth

2. Vernon Louis Parrington, The Beginnings of Critical

Realism in America, pp. 7-10



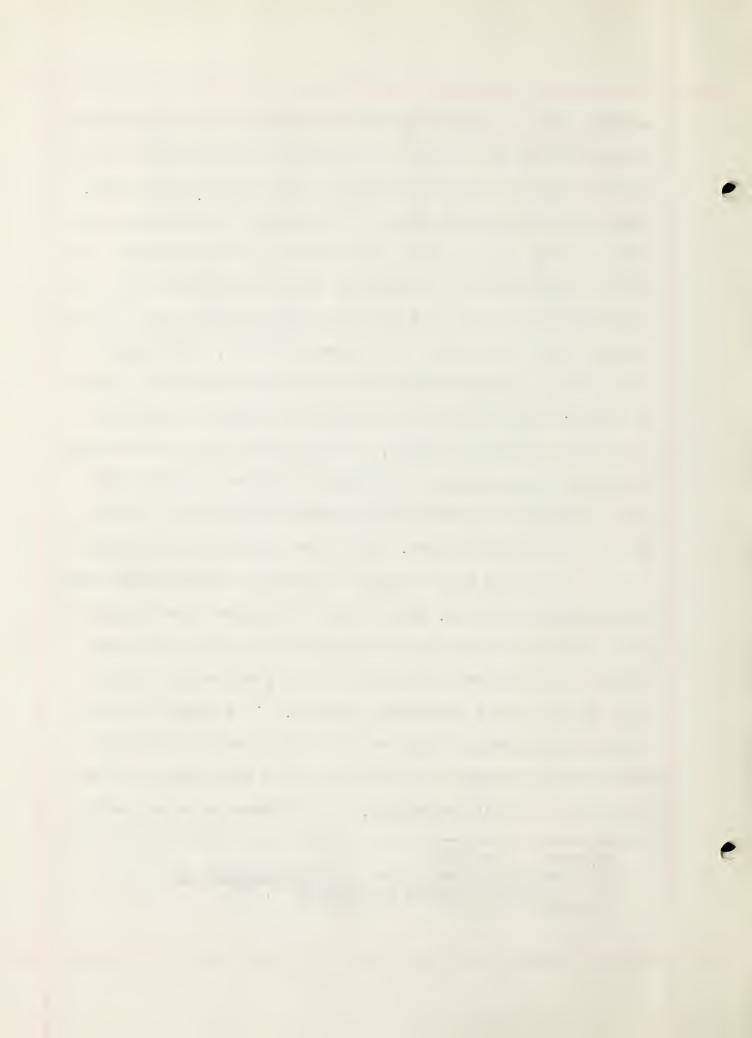
century culture, symbolized by the tie-wig and the Chippendale sideboard, gave way before the frontier spirit sweeping out of the West and the factory production originating in the East.

Typical of the unlovely period of transition in American culture was, for instance, the architecture of the seventies. "It was the golden age of the jig saw, of the brownstone front, of the veranda that ran about the house like a spider web, of the mansard roof, the cupola, the house of stilts. Flamboyant lines and meaningless detail destroyed the structural unity of the whole; tawdry decoration supplanted peauty of materials and a fine balance of masses. A stuffy and fussy riot of fancy, restrained by no feeling for structural lines, supplied the lack of creative imagination, and architecture sank to the level of the jerry-builder. Bad taste could go no further."

3. Ibid., p.48-50

5. Ibid.

^{4.} Vernon Louis Parrington, The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America, p. 69



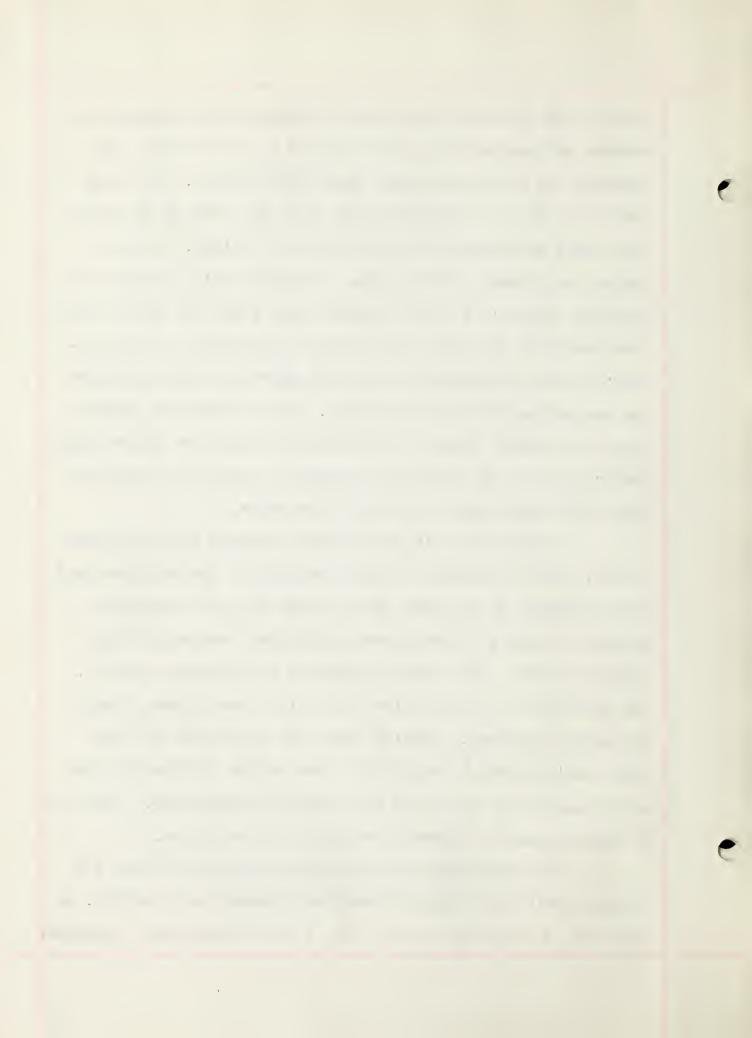
ately in the rights of individual freedom; he was opposed to bankers and monopolists, and he looked to the West for the formation of a freer and more democratic america. It is not surprising that the poets growing up in this era of the seventies heard and answered the challenge of Whitman. It is no wonder that Vachel Lindsay began his apostleship preaching the gospel of beauty; it is not strange that Edgar Lee Masters was concerned with the decay, physical and spiritual, of the village; it does not amaze us that Carl Sandburg feared the growing domination of machine over man. Let us turn now, however, from the youthful period of these men to a picture of the first twenty years of the nineteenth century - the period which witnessed the publication of their first works.

America in this new era was becoming nationally concious, not only because of the extension of the railroads and the settlement of the West, but because of outer expansion.

America, contrary to her avowed principles, was acquiring a colonial empire. The Spanish American War opened a new era.

The annexation of Puerto Rico, The Philippines, Guam, Hawaii, and Alaska followed. America began her assumption of "the white man's burden," not without some degree of idealism, but not without, too, an eye to the practical advantages. The territorial expansion became a leading political issue.

The adventures in territorial annexation over, the nation settled back and focussed her interest upon herself. An interest in things American - art, folklore, antiques, language,

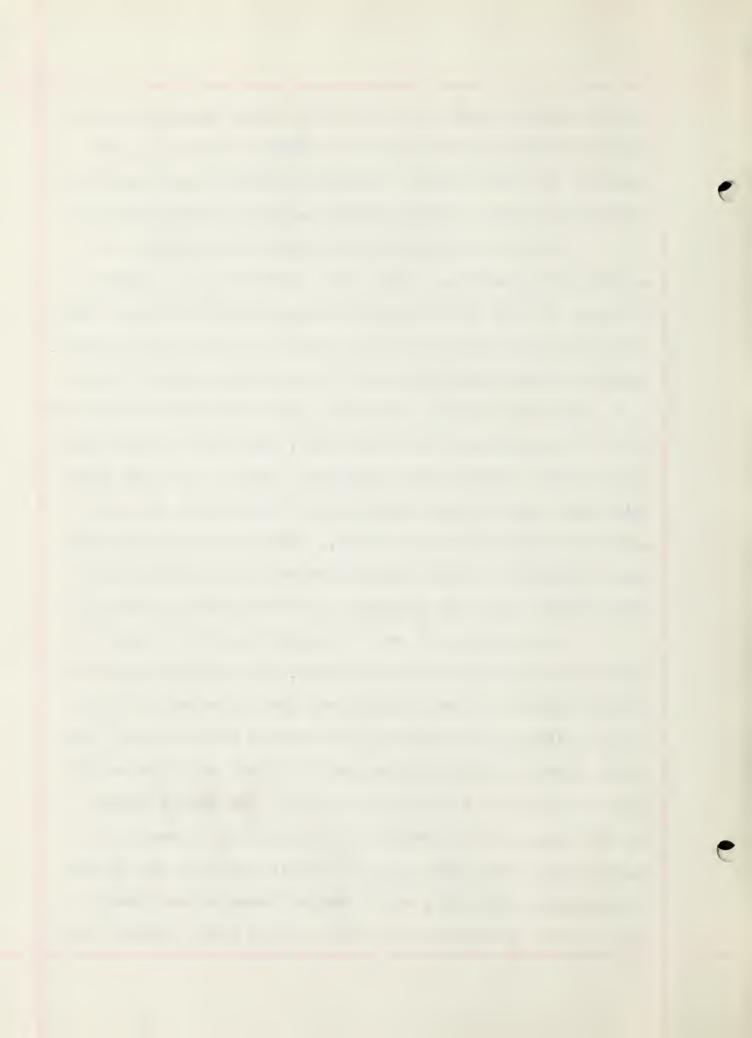


and literature sprang up. Historical novels dealing with the American tradition were written by winston Churchill, Mary Johnston, and Owen Wister. Magazines increased and furnished a favorable outlet for the growing number of younger writers.

Despite this surface national unity, however, the new industrial America, whose ways of education, of thought, of labor, of life were becoming standardized by industry, this new America was torn by economic, social, and political strife. Conflict became inevitable with the increasing power of what V. F. Calverton has been pleased to call the "upper bourgeoisie" in the financial and industrial world. "The petty bourgeoisie" - the farmers, shopkeepers, shippers, traders - all the industrial small men who were oppressed by big business and large capitalists fared worse and worse. Trusts and monopolies and banks controlled by heavy depositors were driving the "petty bourgeoisie," with its ideology of individualism, to the wall.

In politics, as well as in economics, the course of the "petty bourgeoisie" began to lose. Not even the election of Woodrow Wilson, who best represented their interests, could stem the tide of big business and economic exploitation. The growth of the Socialist Labor Party in 1892, and later of the Socialist party in the early part of the twentieth century did not represent the interests of this "petty bourgeoisie."

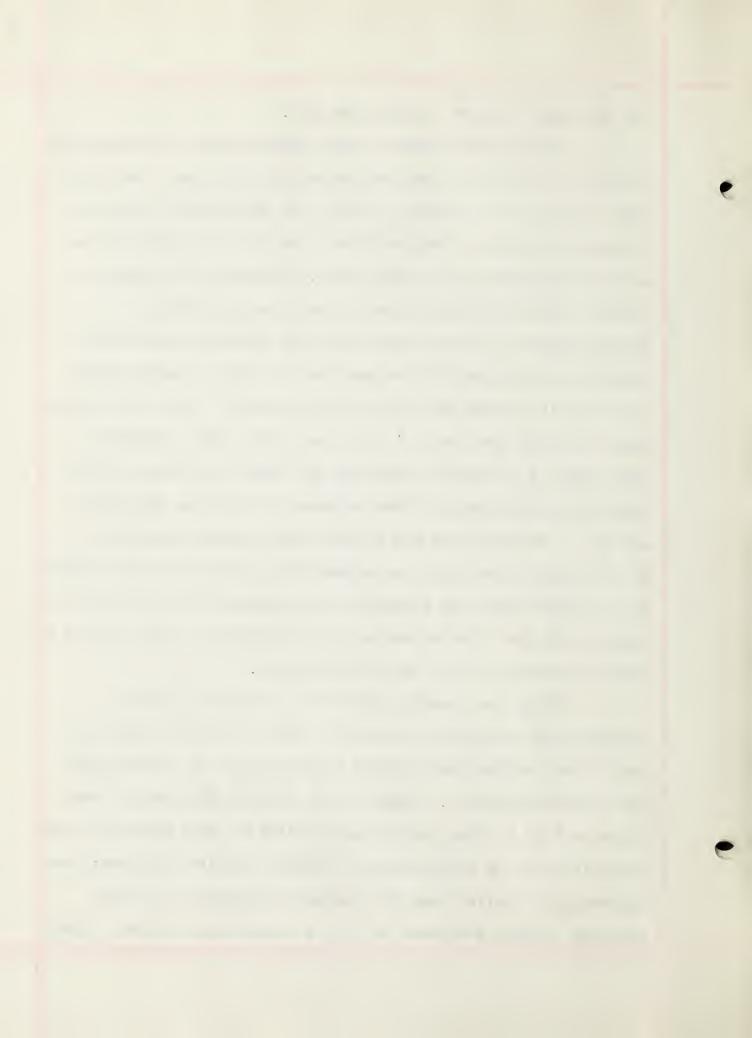
Indeed most of them were alarmed by this growth in the Socialist movement, although a small section began to feel more sympathy for the workers as represented by these parties, than



for the upper classes and big business.

Despite the rise of labor organizations - the Knights of Labor in 1869, the American Federation of Labor, the Industrial Morkers of the World in 1305, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America - despite these, the problem of the laboring man was growing ever more acute. Perhaps this problem is nowhere better expressed than in the inau rural address of Woodrow Wilson in 1913: "There has been something crude and heartless in our haste to succeed and be great. Our thought has been, 'Let every man look out for himself, let every ceneration look out for itself, while we reared miant machinery which made it impossible that any but those who stood at the levers of control should have a chance to look out for themselves, --- We have come now to the sober second thought ---We have made up our minds to square every process of our national life again with the standard te so grandly set up at the becinning and have always carried in our hearts --- This is not a day of triumph; it is a day of dedication."

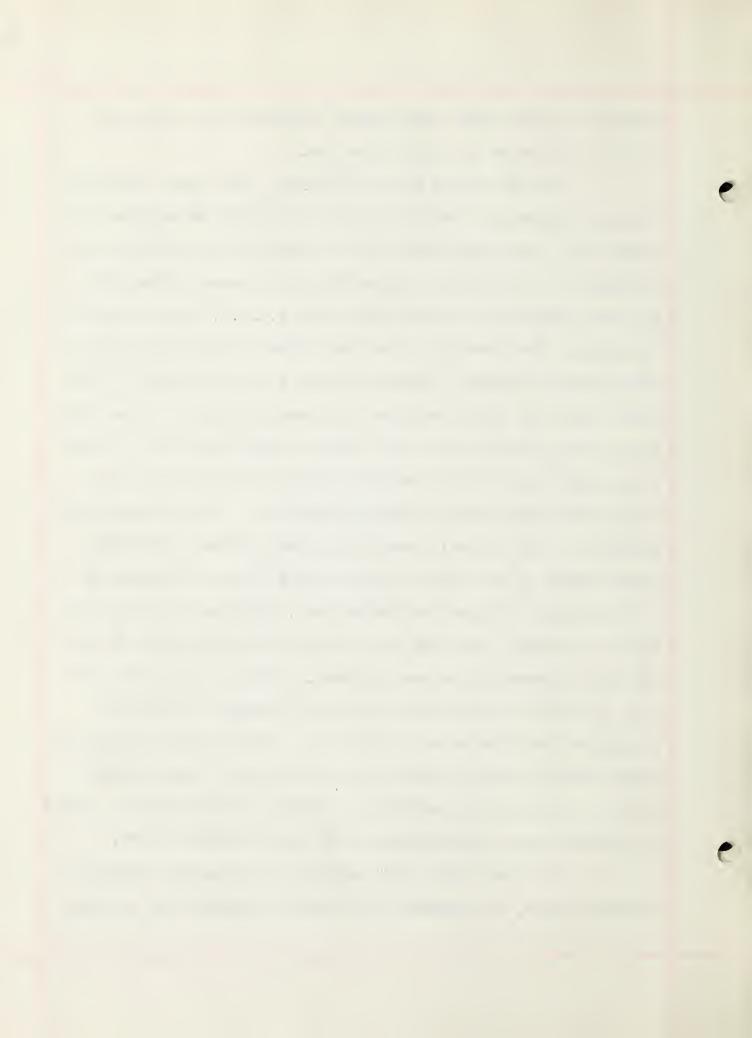
This then was the welter of confusion, social, economic, and political, which was rife at the time when our poets first raised their voices above the din of nationalism and industrialization. Small wonder that Lindsay penned such poems as "Why I Voted the Socialist Ticket"; that Masters wrote lines in which he satirized the republic and its citizens; that Sandburg felt called upon to champion the cause of the industrial machine. There



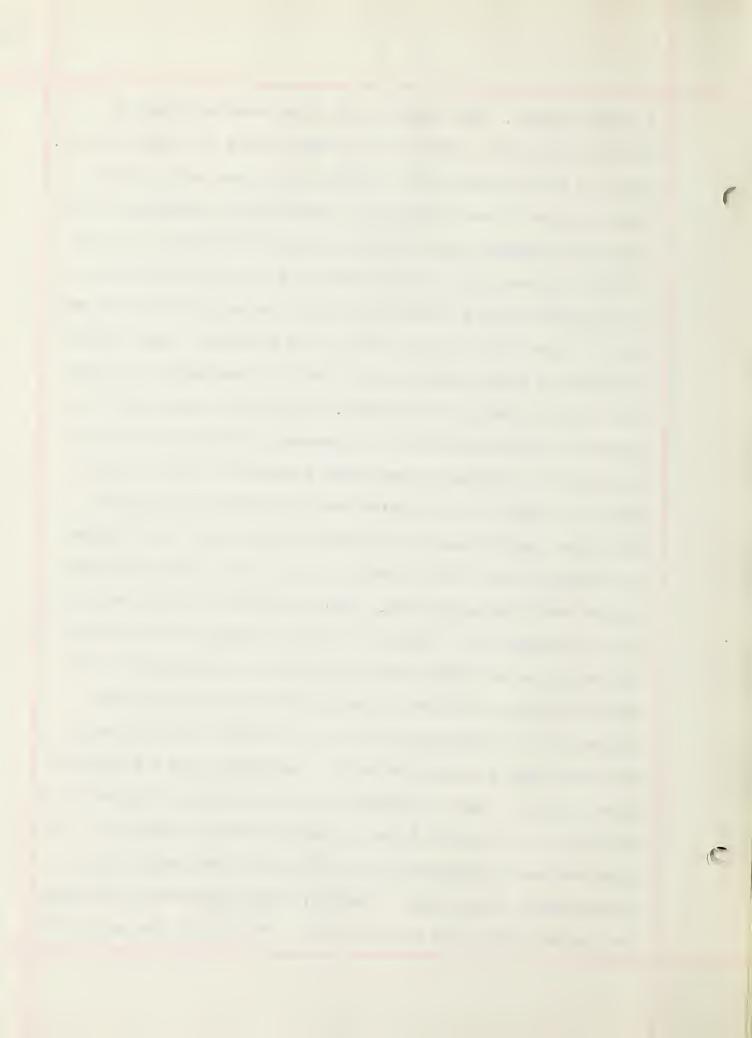
sprang up in the West a new spirit of revolt which found its voice in the works of these three men.

History is not static, however. The years 1914-1920 brought to America intervention in Vestern Europe and the First World War. War colored the life of Americans in a new and terrifying way. An exciting community spirit arose, encendered by such enterprises as the Red Cross, the Y.M.C.A., and the Salvation Army. The pressure of war made itself felt in the home of each American citizen, whether he sent a well-loved boy to the battlefield, or merely suffered the inconvenience of sugar rationing and ployed up his front yard to grow potatoes. A wave of emotional patriotism swept the country, bringing as its corollaries anti-pacifism and mob cruelty. Intellectual life centered on war issues: books on European history left their dusty places on the shelves, and volumes extolling democracy and democratic ideals came to the fore. Science, fostered by the war research, eroanded and became more intelligible to the layman. Interest in science widened. Religious thinking became modified as relirious observance lessened and orthodor religious doctrines were in disfavor. Restlessness formed the chief note of the war years - restlessness and uncertainty with a resulting wild desire for exciting entertainment, thrills and novelty, and experimentation in every aspect of life.

This World War left America a world power, burdened with war debts, an interested but passive participant in plans



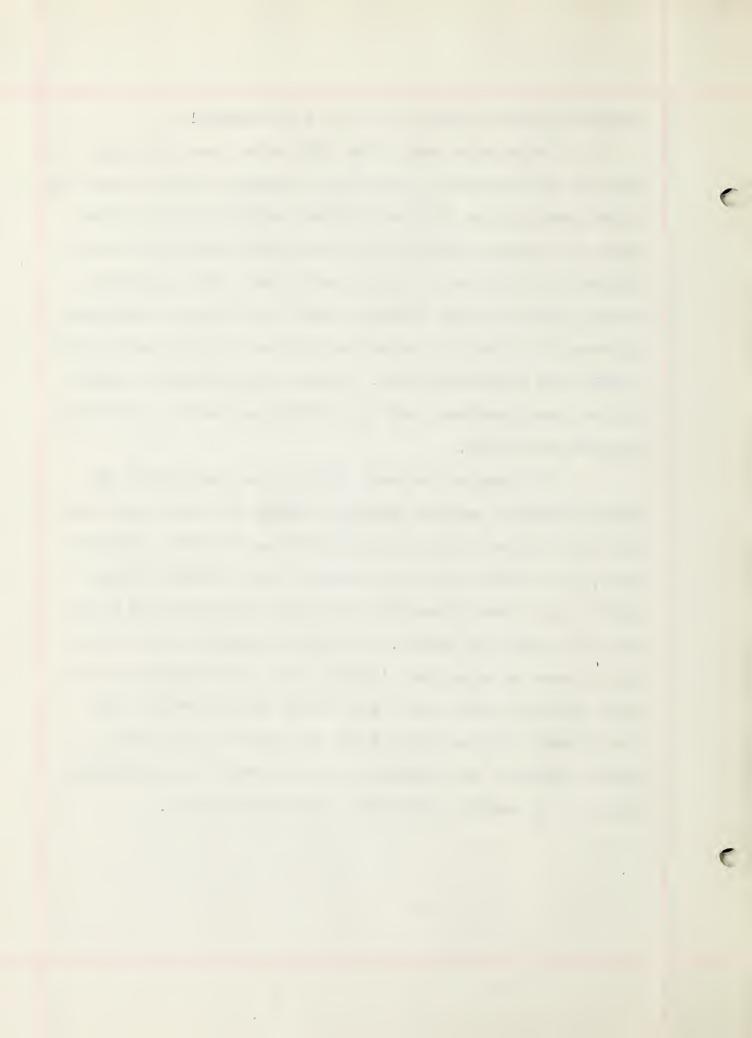
for world peace. Her domestic politics centered upon her economic life, the center of which had become the pusiness man. The very United States was a gigantic business with all its ramifications - mass production, advertising, installment buying, stock-trading, and building booms. Prohibition, enacted in 1919, necessitated a law enforcement body, and resulted in the organized liquor traffic with all its associated crime and evil. Crime rose to the level of big business. Mass production did not limit itself to the world of business; it flowed over into the world of amusement. Millions of Americans attended the motion pictures in thousands of theatres all over the country; millions of Americans turned the dials of their radios to listen to syndicated radio programs; millions of Americans bought standard automobiles and took to the highway to spend not only the new wealth but the new leisure fostered by the ever-growing machine. Mass production touched even the world of education. Compulsory school attendance with resulting variation in courses and the growth of the so-called progressive school, interest in popularized science, history, philosophy, and psychology - all this turned out millions of Americans with a maximum of self - confidence and a minimum of individuality. Most out-standing of all post-war factors was, perhaps, the collapse of the old moral codes of behavior. Unorganized and widespread revolt of youth made itself felt in short skirts, short hair, lipstick, mixed smoking and drinking, the parked sedan, and sex obsession. Well might the poet and



evangelist wonder where was the soul of America!

These same years after 1920 were, however, among the most intellectually productive in American history; and one of the most popular post-war literary subjects was the "New Poetry." Primary schools introduced simple poems into their curricula; schools and colleges multiplied their literature courses; women's clubs fostered poetry shop talks; publishers increased the number of magazines devoted to poetry and opened a market for new anthologies. Poetry had penetrated a whole national consciousness, and the penetrating had not, of course, occurred over night.

The imagist movement of 1912, the publication of Harriet Monroe's magazine <u>Poetry</u> in 1912, the free verse movement with its new exhilarating liberation of poetry from old forms, old cliches, stilted vocabulary and limited subject matter — all these gradually developing influences had nourished the growth of poetry. Many of the poets turned to romantic moods or occasional thoughts that were crowded out of their everyday lives, but a few worked with interests that were significant, and among these few may be found again Lindsay, Masters, and Sandburg, writing still in the Whitman tradition of American materials everywhere at hand.

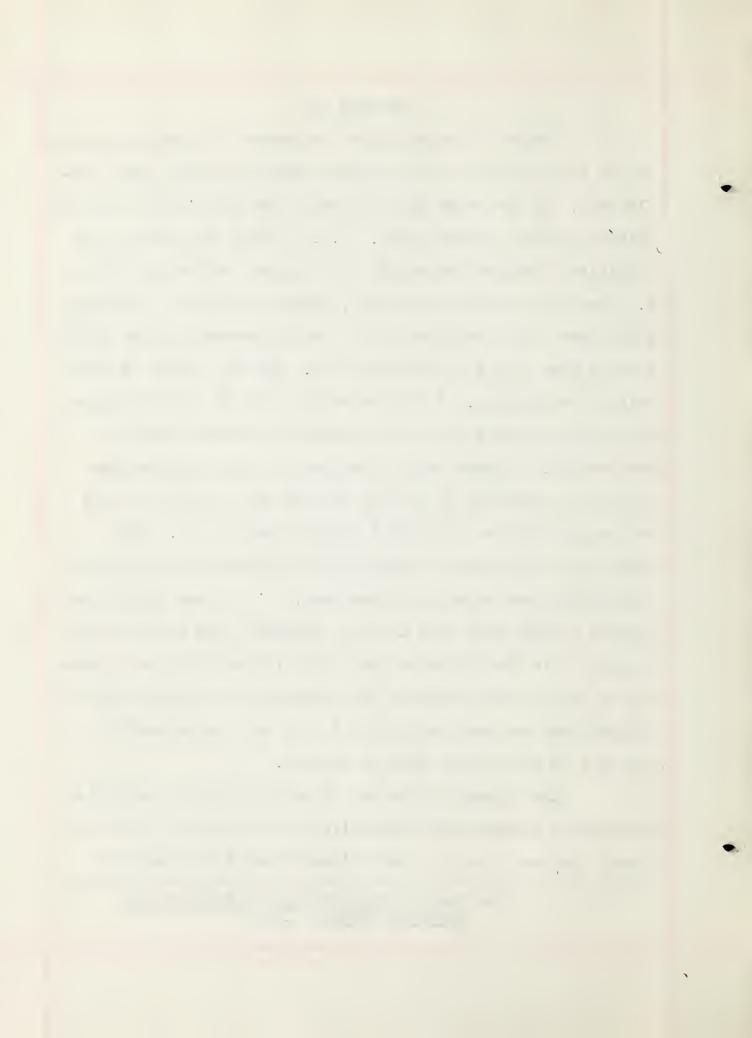


Chapter II

Center of the so-called renascence of American poetry in the early years of the twentieth century was the great Middle West. In the years just following the World's Fair of 1893. Chicago suddenly became vocal. W.M.R. French and the new art institute, Theodore Thomas and his symphony orchestra, William R. Harper and the new university, authors, artists, sculptors, publishers - all contributed to a new adolescent culture which finally came of age in the year 1914. And the center of this culture was Chicago. This rise of the West in our literature contributed a new vigor, and a robust if somewhat barbaric Americanism. "Writers sang of America working, fighting the capitalist, aspiring to see her play as well as work, to see her really what her 'patriots' pretend that she is. They called upon the ghosts of Washington and Lincoln to aid in establishing a new industrial democracy." It was in this new, rapidly growing West that Lindsay, Sandburg, and Masters grew up, and it is from Illinois that their voices first made themselves heard, each answering the challenge of the new spirit of independence and each responding in his own unique manner to the call of the Muse to sing of America.

Conditioned by the age in which he lived, bearing a personality tremendously indicative of the forces of heredity, Vachel Lindsay, first of the Illinois singers to sound his

^{1.} Bruce Weirick, From Whitman to Sandburg in American Poetry, p.220



notes, was indeed sui generis. "Mystic, reformer, propagandist, social radical, vagabond, aesthete - - among his heroes were Jesus, Confucius, Swedenborg, Alexander Campbell, Johnny Appleseed, Lincoln, Poe, Walt Whitman, and William Jennings Bryan. Lindsay crusaded for temperance, the old-time Campbellite religion, and sexual purity. When he tried to think he got lost. but when his sense of the beautiful overpowered him he created a memorable ocem. Like Whitman he heard America's varied carols - the honking of automobile horns, the mumbling of negroes in a New York waterfront saloon, the up-and-down guiver of the politician's harangue, the silent foot-tread of a ghost walking the streets at midnight, the yelling of college students at a football game, the negro-preacher's crescendo rising to a roar, the singing of the rachel-jane on a Kansas prairie. In Lindsay's mind these sound impressions naturally shout themselves to a gospel-hymn pattern." 2.

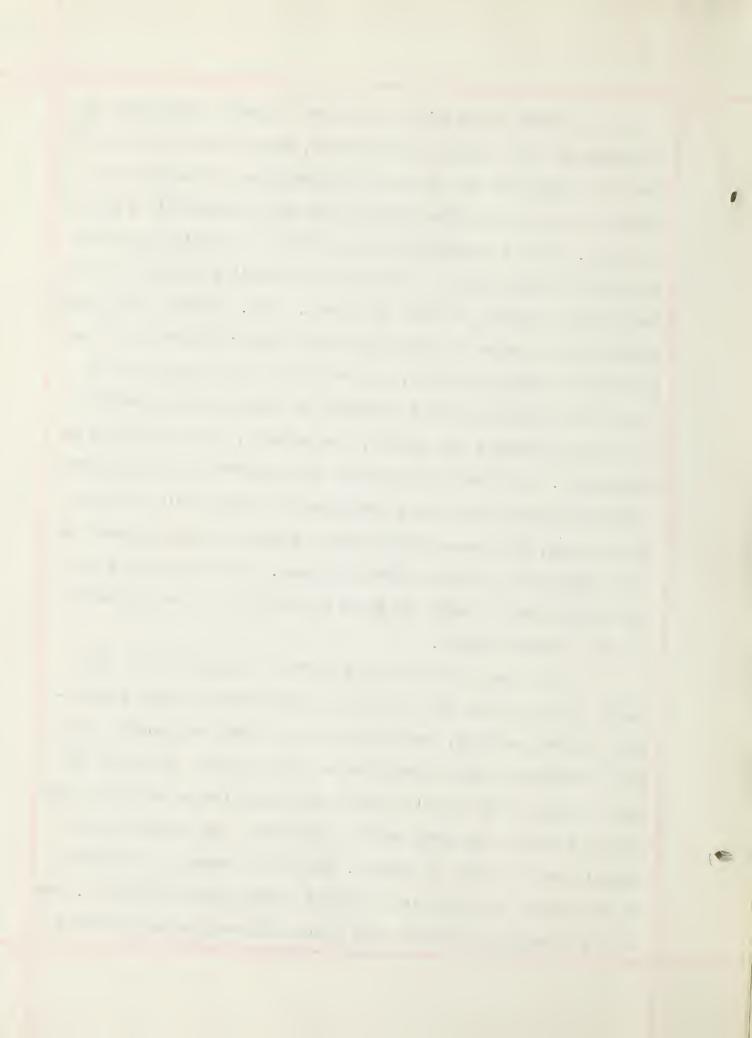
Though the gospel of Lindsay's social philosophy had many faucets, one dominant theme fed the stream of his thought — and that theme was the power of beauty. Gorham Munson in Destinations seems to have expressed very well Lindsay's philosophy when he said that "Lindsay aimed to make Beauty and Democracy synonymous, with the Church standing above sanctifying their union." 3. Certain it is that in Lindsay this blend of religion, patriotism, and beauty fed the imagination which pictured in passionate verse the America of the millenium.

^{2.} Vernon Loggins, I near America, p.103
3. Gorham Munson, Destinations, p.67 (F.Y. 1928)

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Vachel Lindsay's inheritance played a large part in his make-up. Dr. Lindsay, his father, was a child of the Civil War, who inherited the post-war difficulties, financial and social, of a transplanted Kentuckyian who retained his Southern ways. He was impulsive and resolute, a fanatical prohibitionist, a deadly hater of tobacco, an ardent supporter of the Campbellite Church, a lover of travel. Mrs. Lindsay, the poet's mother, was a woman of great spiritual force; gifted with the ability to paint, to write, and to direct, she was active in church work and a militant promoter of civic reform, constantly fighting against the saloon, lawlessness, and corruption in government. An idealistic person, she believed in social perfectibility and stood for a democracy in which God's law controlled men, and human beings became equals as high-minded. devout, temperate, chaste, clean citizens. It is easy to see in the characters of these two parents the germ of the personality which became Vachel.

The poet to be, born in 1879, in Springfield, Illinois, grew up when the so-called Gilded Age was just commencing. Stock gambling, centralization of money and power, railroad expansion, labor disturbances, race riots - all were as
much a part of the poet's growth and education as were his high
school studies, his work at Hiram College, his courses at art
school, and his trip to Europe. His nature made him sensitive
to the social and political changes taking place about him. The
election campaign of 1896 made a deep impression upon him and



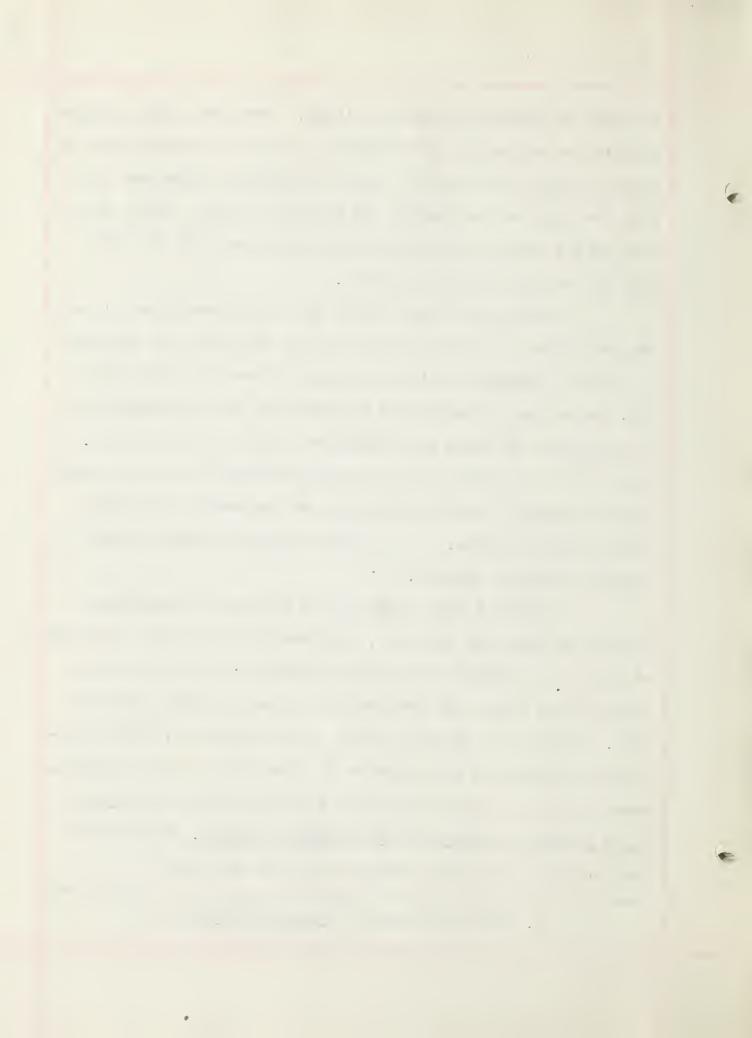
colored his thinking quite definitely. Bryan with his protests against the oppression of monopolies, against demonetization of silver, against the tariff, against everything which was robbing the poor man and making the rich man richer - Bryan was a hero to the young poet who stood on the street with his best girl and watched the Bryan parade.

Lindsay had moral fervor and a high seriousness; he was determined to reform the conditions about him, to shoulder the task of making the city and country freer and more beautiful, but he was to make these attempts not as a statesman, but in the spirit of Plato who dreamed of a City of the Perfect.

"Every inch of my will up to thirty-one years goes to the evolution of myself, and the perfection of the mental, physical, and spiritual machine. — — I have a world to save and must prepare, prepare, prepare."

Lindsay looked about him at the drab, commonplace, complacent towns and villages, architectural evidences, perhaps, of that low cultural taste of the seventies; he observed the people whose lives were bent solely on the material things of life. Lindsay, by nature a lover of the beautiful, and by education a student of art, took to the road in a literal fashion, traveling afoot from fare to farm with his pamphlets, Rhymes to Be Traded for Bread and The Gospel of Beauty. He preached the doctrine of the new localism — in his own vords:

^{4.} Edgar Lee Masters, Vachel Lindsay, p. 75



I come to you penniless and afoot to oring a message. I am starting a new religious idea.

---- the church of beauty ----. The things most worth while are one's own hearth and neighborhood. We should make our own home and neighborhood the most democratic, the most beautiful and the holiest in the world. 5.

We see his creed clearly - democracy, beauty, religion!

Lindsay's poetry was part of his campaign and to
Lindsay poetry was not for the few, not for the educated, but
for all America. To Lindsay poetry, like music, was first of
all for the ear. It was to be read aloud and with action.

Hence, in every household Lindsay read his poems, and often in
the kitchen, by the dingy light of lamps, he taught the eagerly
listening farmers to chant a response or sing the refrains. It
is no wonder that he won over converts!

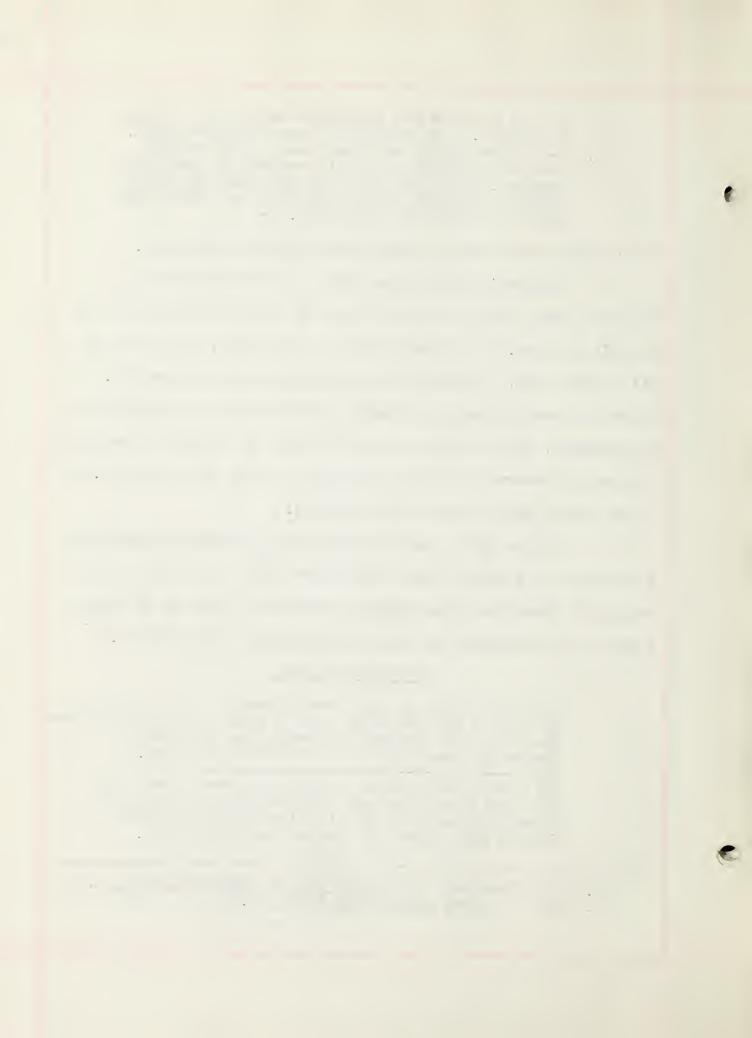
Of the three poems which follow, Vachel Lindsay himself said, "I recited these poems more than any others in my mendicant preaching tour through the West. Taken as a triad, they hold in solution my theory of American civilization."

The Proud Farmer

Into the acres of the newborn state
He poured his strength, and ploughed his ancient name,
And, when the traders followed him, he stood
Towering above their furtive souls and tame.

He lived with liberal hand, with guests from far, With talk and joke and fellowship to spare,—Watching the wide world's life from sun to sun, Lining his walls with books from everywhere.

^{5.} Louis Untermeyer, The New Era in American Poetry, p. 70 6. Yachel Lindsay, Collected Poems, p. 71



He read by night, he built his world by day.

The farm and house of God to his were one.

For forty years he preached and plowed and wrought - A statesman in the fields, who bent to none.

His plowmen-neighbors were as lords to him. His was an ironside, democratic pride. He served a rigid Christ, but served him well -And, for a lifetime, saved the countryside.

The Illinois Village

(This poem, while it expresses hope in the simplicity and purity of the little prairie town, with the village church and the district school, at the same time breathes a sigh "for the sweet life wrenched and torn by thundering commerce, fierce and bare".)

On the Building of Springfield

Let not our town be large, remembering That little Athens was the Muses' home,

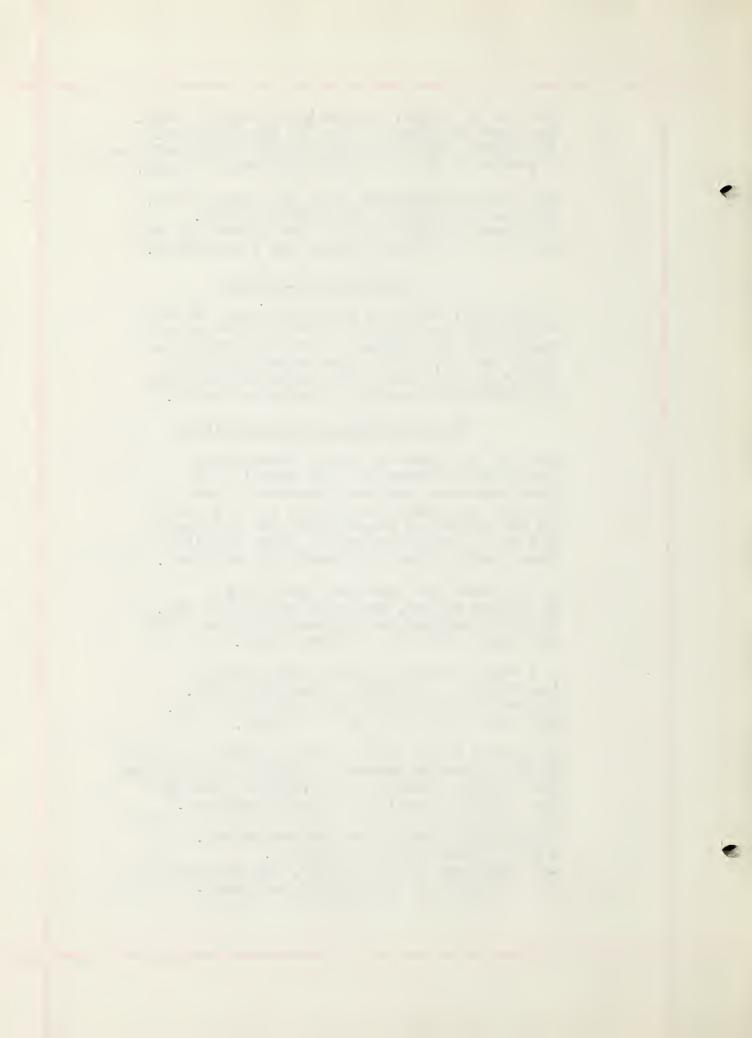
Now let each child be joined as to a church To her perpetual hopes, each man ordained: Let every street be made a reverent aisle Where Music grows and Beauty is unchained.

Let Science and Machinery and Trade Be slaves of her, and make her all in all, Building against our blatant, restless tile An unseen, skilful, medieval vall.

Let every citizen be rich toward God. Let Christ, the beggar, teach divinity, Let no ran rule the holds his money dear. Let this, our city, be our luxury.

We should build parks that students from afar Would choose to starve in, rather than go home, Fair little squares, with Phidian ornament, Food for the spirit, milk and honeycomb.

We must have any Lincoln-hearted men.
A city is not builded in a day.
And they must do their work, and come and go,
While countless generations pass away.



Along with his poems Lindsay carried on his preaching trips a series of drawings with appropriate slogans. The title - "The Village Improvement Parade" - speaks for itself. Some of the slogans follow:

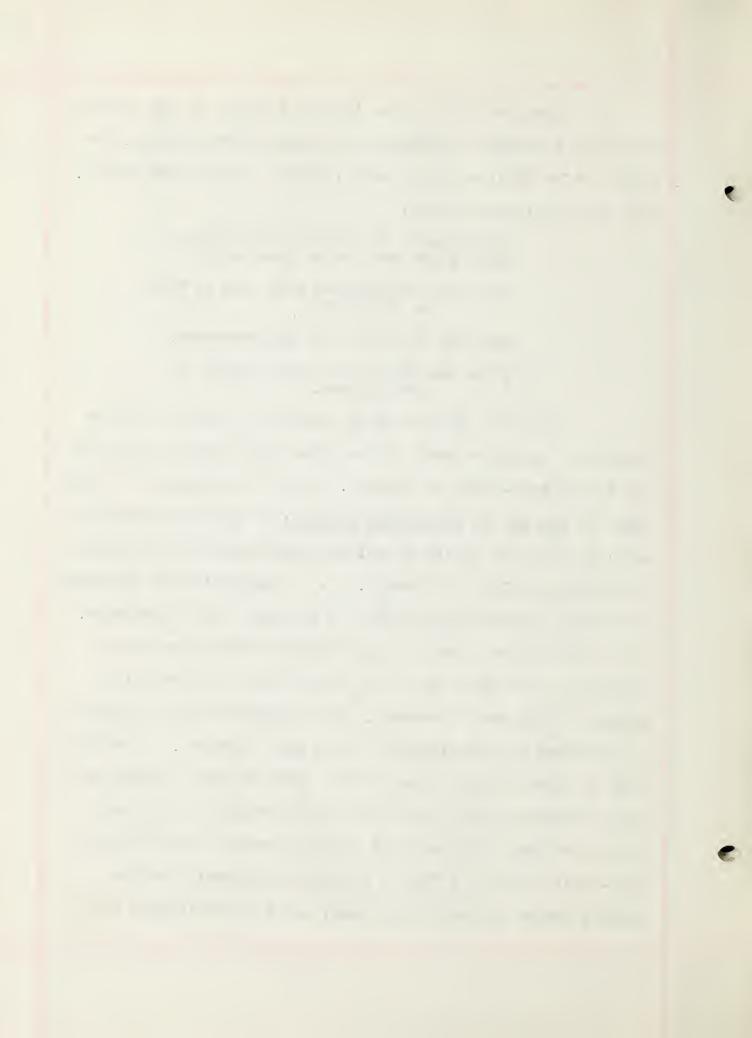
Fair Streets are Better than Silver Green Parks are Better than Gold

Bad Taste is Mob-Law; Good Public Taste is Democracy

Ugliness is a kind of Misgovernment.

A Bad Designer is to that Extent, a Bad Citizen.

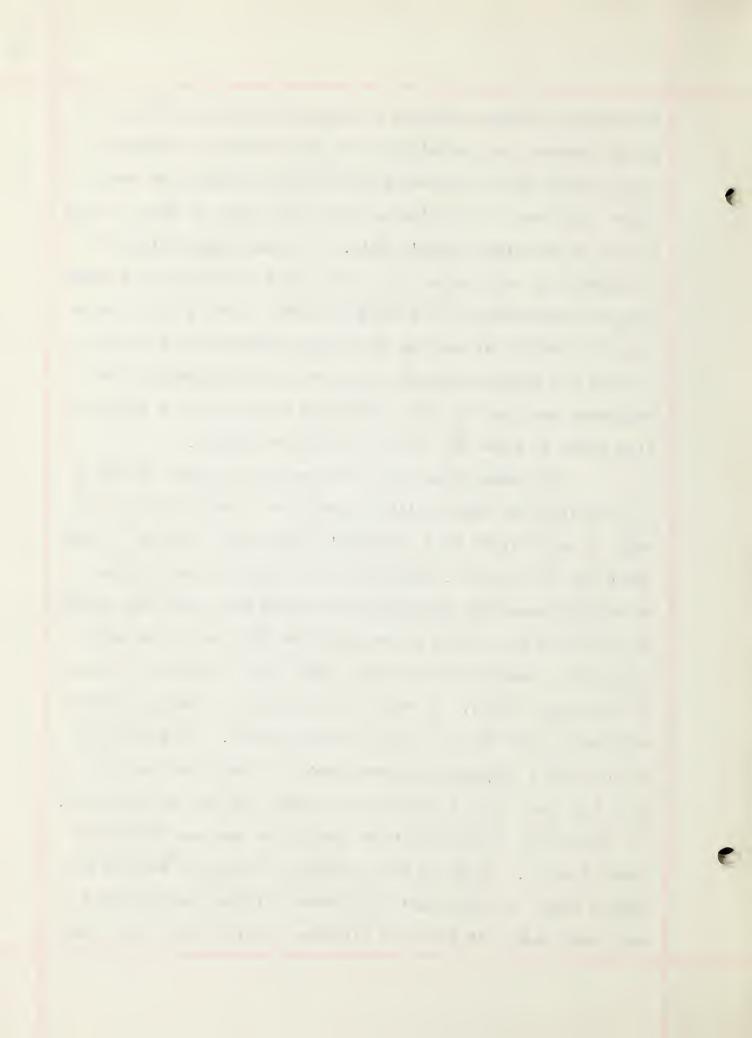
From the all-consuming passion of Lindsay for the beautiful, originate many of his other more specific ideas on the social well-being of America. Take, for example, his comments in The Art of the Moving Picture; to quote Lindsay himself: "I begin by airing my opinion that the best censorship is a public feeling for beauty. - - - I advocate the endowment of certain special films likely to be neglected by commerce. - - - The various types of plays suggest particular social thoughts. The Action Play, it seems to me, is especially adapted to the moral crusader. The Intimate Play is adapted to endowment and development by the pure aesthete .-- Meditation in another field, that of the Crowd Picture, brings me to the contemporary fact that the cheap photoplay is the best known rival and eliminator of the slum saloon, the erstwhile poor-man's club. - - - Then I show how California, as the natural moving picture playground, has the possibility of



developing a unique cultured leverage upon America. Then I bring forward the proposition that the photoplay is such a good natural medium for architectural propaganda that architects could use it to stimulate the rebuilding of America into a sort of perpetual World's Fair. - - And maintaining that the photoplay cuts deeper into some stratifications of society than the newspapers or the book have ever gone, I try to show that the destiny of America from many aspects may be bound up in what the prophet-wizards among her photo-playwrights and producers mark out for her, for those things which a whole nation dares to hope for, it may in the end attain.

"To make films of a more beautiful United States is as practical and worth-while a custom as to make military spy maps of every niche of a neighbor's territory, putting in each fence and cross-roads. Those who would satisfy the national pride with something besides battle-flags must give our people an objective as shining and splendid as war when it is most glittering, something Napoleonic, and with no outward pretense of excessive virtue. We want a substitute as dramatic internationally, yet world-winning, friend making. If America is to become the financial center through no fault of her own, that fact must have a symbol other than guns on the sea-coast.

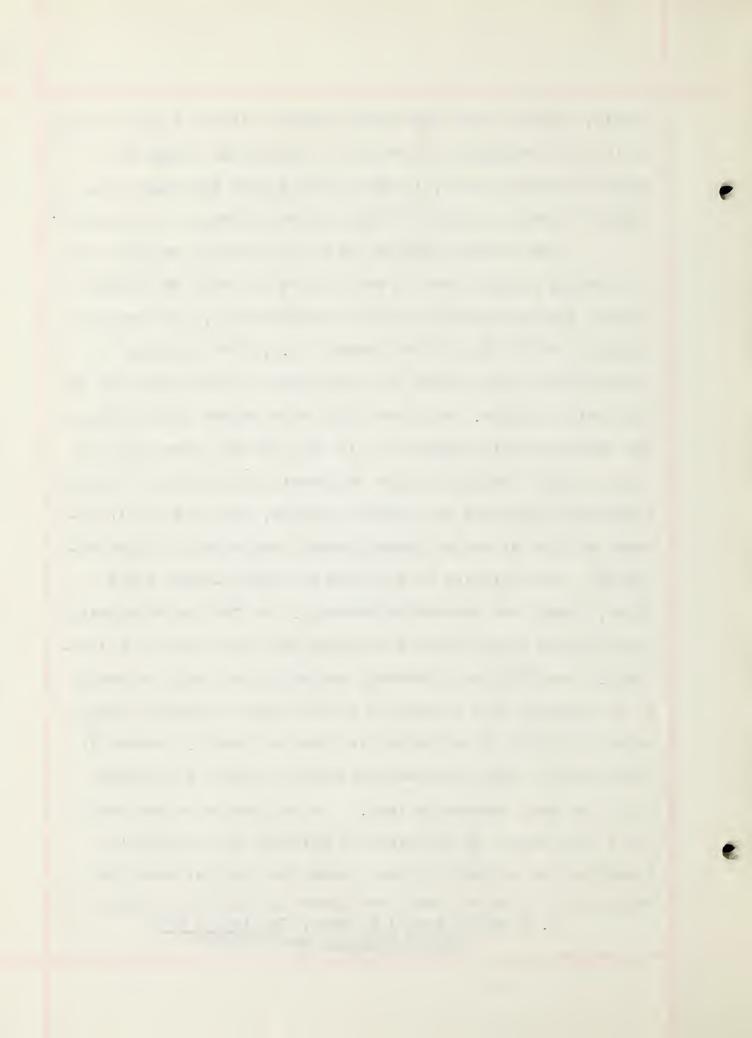
—— America is in the state of mind where she must visualize herself again. If it is not possible to bring in the New Jerusalem today by public act, with every citizen eating bread and honey under his vine and fig-tree, owning forty acres and



a mule, singing hymns and saying prayers all his leisure hours, it is still reasonable to think out tremendous things the American people can do, in the light of what they have done, without sacrificing any of their native cussedness or kick." 7.

One of these things which the American people could do, thought Lindsay, was to reconstruct the soul of America through the reconstruction of her architecture. We see this emphasis on building in his poetry - e.g. "The Building of Springfield" - and we see it specifically in the same book on the moving picture. "Let each city take expert counsel from the architectural demigods how to tear out the dirty core of its principal business square and erect a combination of civic centre and permanent and glorious bazaar. Let the public debate the type of state flowers, trees, and shrub that are expedient, the varieties of villages and middle-sized towns, farms, homes, and connecting parkways. --- The great material projects are often easier to realize than the little moral reforms. Beautiful architectural undertakings, while appearing to be material, and succeeding by the laws of American enterorise bring with them the healing hand of beauty. Besuty is not directly pious, but does more civilizing in its proper hour than many sermons or laws .- - - Is there a reform worth while that cannot be embodied and enforced by a builder's invention? So without too much theorizing why not erect our

^{7.} Nicholas Vachel Lindsay, The Art of the Moving Picture, \$5-7,246,248



new America and move into it?"

Firm support of prohibition and an ardent antisaloon fervor is not inconsistent with a conception of beauty such as Lindsay's. A man of his temperament and belief could but look with distaste upon the slum saloon with its equipment of the "so-called 'leg' picture of a woman, a photograph of a prize-fighter, and some colored portraits of goats and to advertise various brands of beer"; " he could but deplore the "shame of the American drinking place", the bar-tender who dominated its thinking, whose "cynical and hardened soul wiped out a portion of the influence of the public school, the li-10. but most of all brary, and the self-respecting newspaper"; he could but grieve at the social tragedies resulting from the evil of alcoholism. It was as a substitute for the slum saloon that he velcomed the neighborhood motion picture house which brought to the tense, taut nerves of the city worker a means of psychological escape far superior to the escape through alcohol.

Typical of the rhythmic swing and jazz refrain of much of Lindsay's poetry is "The Drunkard's Funeral". Not among the best of his poems, it nevertheless presents a characteristic Lindsay plea in a characteristic Lindsay manner.

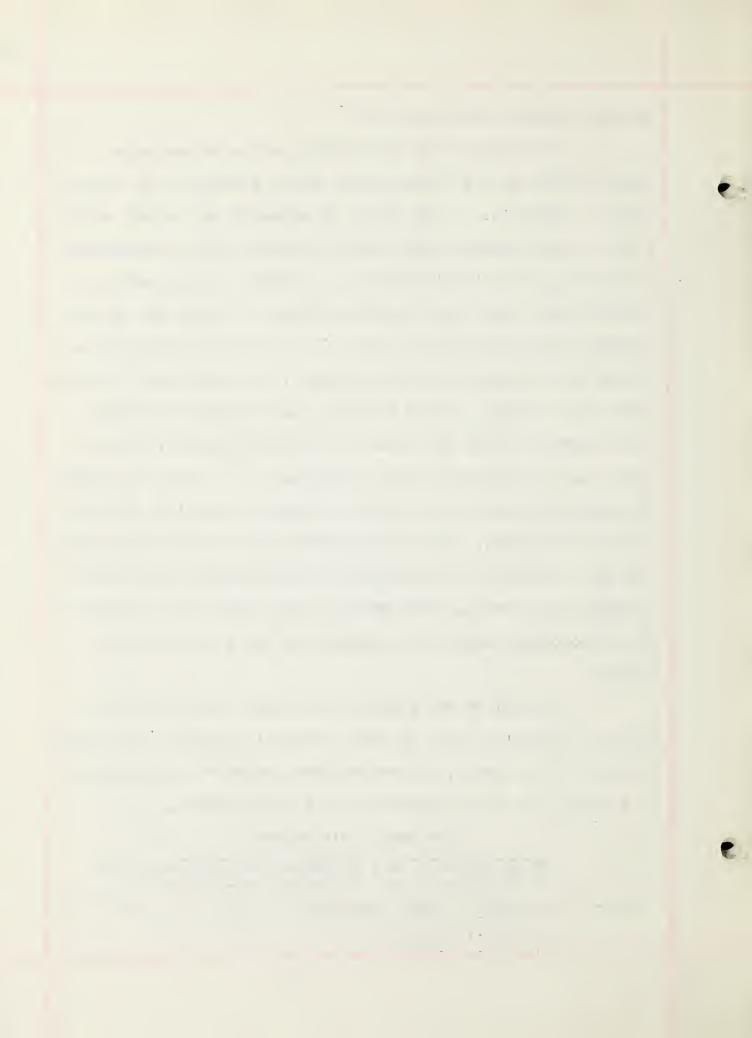
The Drunkard's Funeral

"That fellow in the coffin led a life most foul.
A fierce defender of the red bar-tender,

^{8.} Ioid., p. 248, 250, 251

^{9.} Ibid., p. 209

^{10.} Ibid., p. 215



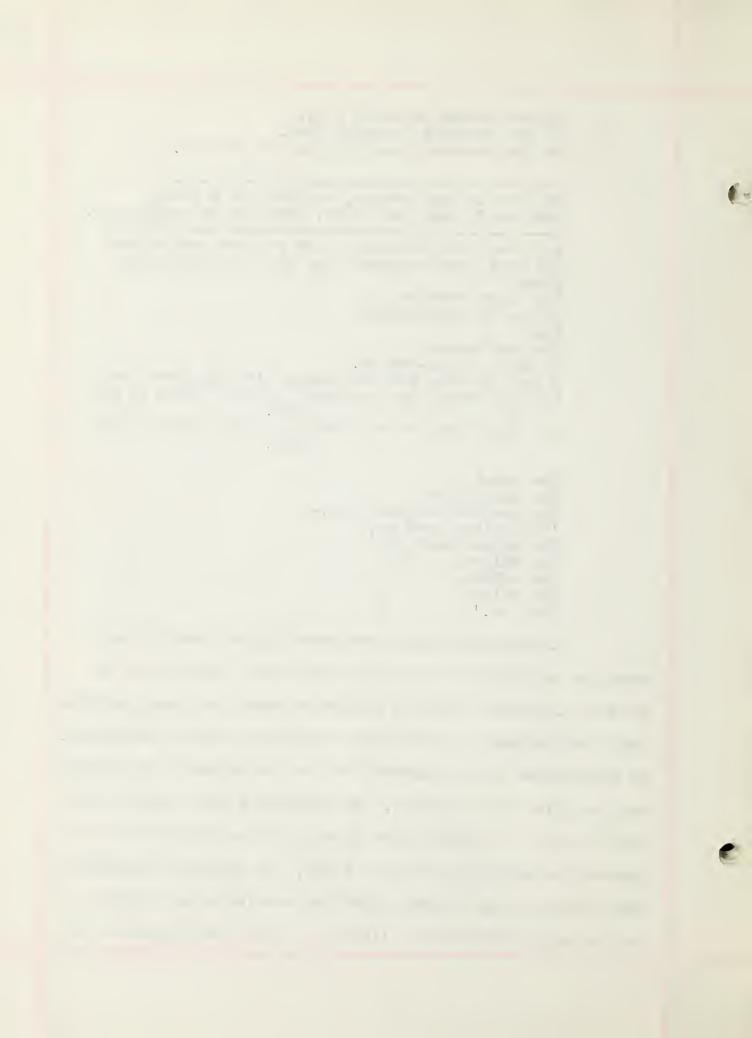
At the church he would rail, At the preacher he would howl. He planted every deviltry to see it grow.

He died of the tremens, as crazy as a loon, And his friends were glad, when the end came soon.

And now, good friends, since you see how it ends,
Let each nation-mender flay the red bar-tender,
Abhor
The transgression
Of the red bar-tender, Ruin
The profession
Of the red bar-tender:
Force him into business where his work does good.
Let him learn how to plough, let him learn to chop
wood.
Let him learn how to plough, let him learn to chop
wood.

The moral,
The conclusion,
The verdict now you know:'The saloon must go,
The saloon,
The saloon,
The saloon,
Must go.'

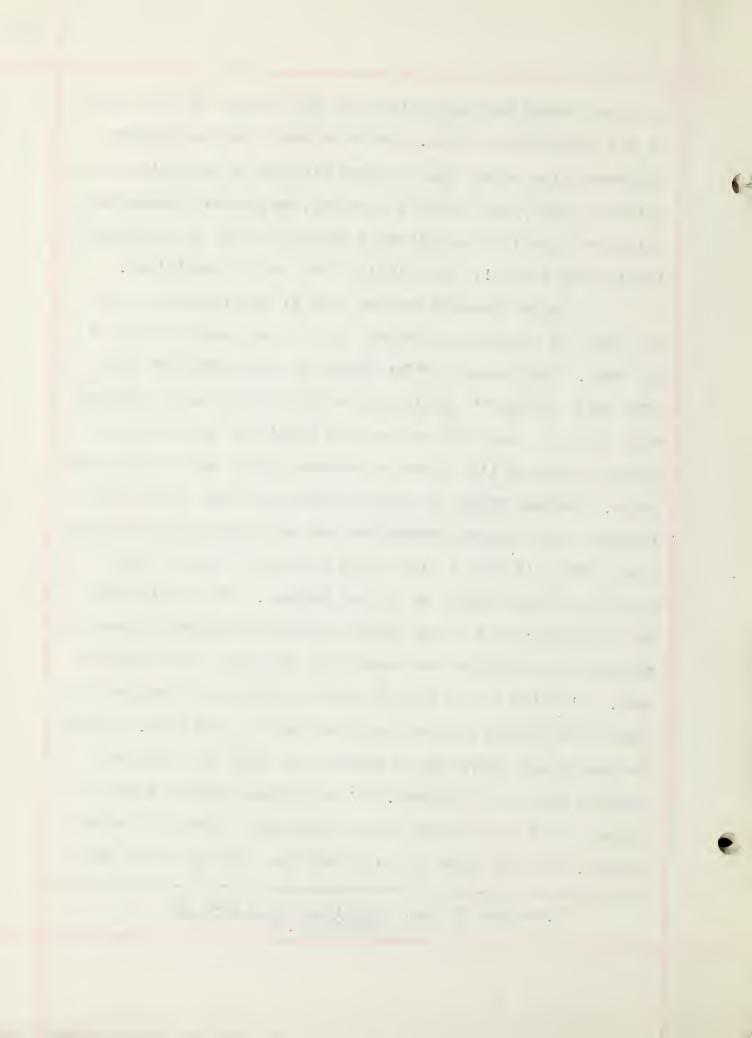
Lindsay the ardent reformer did not have at hand practical solutions to carry out his ideals, and yet it is evident, I believe, that he counted a great deal upon American youth and believed in the vital corrective force of education. He was devoted to the universities and high-schools of America and the life they represent. He believed in the constructive moral force of a college like Hiram which he considered to be preoccupied with the Christian ideal. He deplored commercialized lecturing and the fact that the moneyed organizations, not the universities and colleges, not the intelligentsia of



America, booked the Chestertons and the Noyeses and the great of the intellectual world. He envisioned a motion picture industry which walked hand in hand with the universities, the literary lions, and even the churches, to present documentary films of scientific and literary research (such as a graduate thesis—God forbid!), of religious art, and of sculpture.

Vachel Lindsay was the bard of Americanism and of the whole of democratic America, but he sang particularly of the West. Such poems as "The Ghosts of the Buffaloes" and "The Santa Fe Trail" breathe the spirit of the est. But more than this, he conceived of the true spirit of American democracy as having its source in Western ideals and Western Americans. Stephen Graham in his delightful account of his walking tour with Lindsay quotes the poet as saying of the Western land - "This is what I like - the prairie to the horizon, no fences, no stone walls, as in New England. It is all broad and unlimited; that is why since the days of Andrew Jackson all the great politicians have come from the lest - the unfenced West. I'd like to put all the Boston and New York people out here on the plains and let the plain men run the East. --- Only the desert and mountains of America can heal the business hardened skulls of the East." 11. And Graham himself says of Lindsay, "I find a belief in the wilderness strong in Vachel Lindsay. He holds that the wild West has been and still must

ll. Stephen Graham, Tramping with a Poet in the Rockies, p. 15

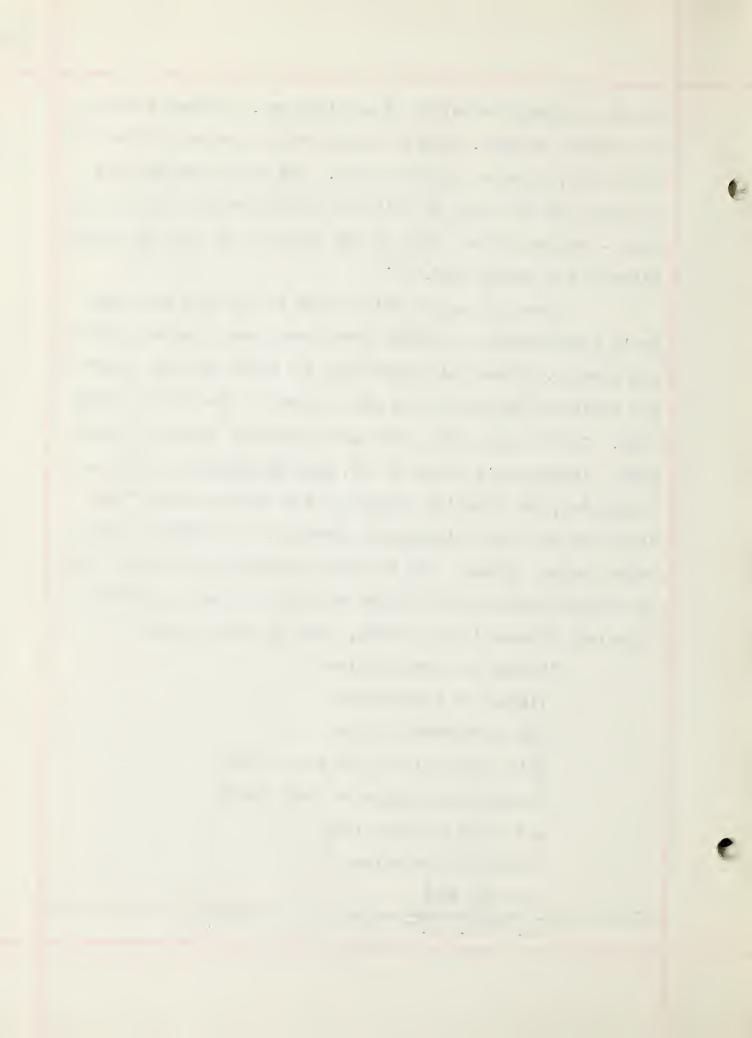


be the spiritual lodestone of American men. Untaked America has remade the race. Andrew Jackson was the voice of the Test of his day, Abraham Lincoln of his. And though New England has held the beginning of letters, he divines that the wilderness - the mountains - will be the source of the coming inspiration of the coming time." 12.

Closely bound to this belief in the West was Lindsay's hero-worship of certain great Americans - Jackson, Bryan,
and Lincoln. Though his admiration for these men was a part of
his political belief, it was also a part of his social philosophy. In "Cld, Old, Old, Old Andrew Jackson" we have, for example, "Democracy's proudest son, The Wilderness brought to
Washington, the frontier brought to its place of power" and
"only the rich want his name to grow dim." In "Eryan, Bryan,
Bryan, Bryan," Lindsay with the hero-worshipping eyes of a lad
of sixteen writes of the defeat of Bryan in the presidential
election and sees in his defeat, with an adult vision

"Defeat of western silver
Victory of letterfiles
And plutocrats in miles
With dollar signs upon their coats,
Diamond watchchains on their vests
And spats on their feet,
Victory of custodians,
Plymouth Rock

12. Ibid., p.73

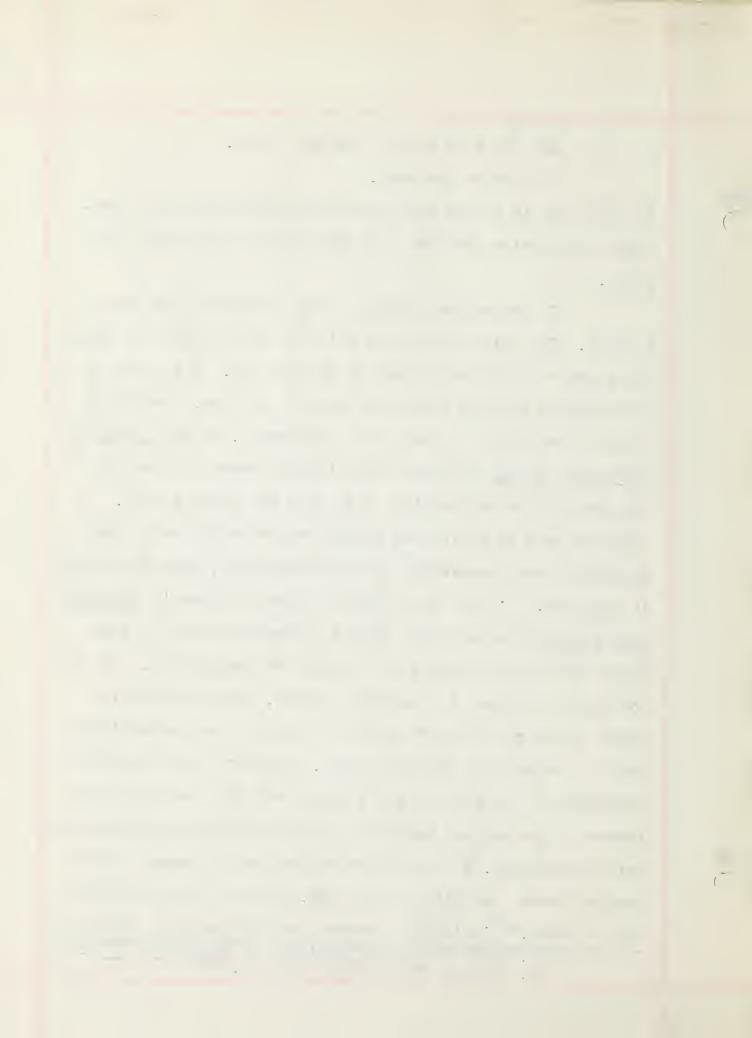


And all that inbred landlord stock. Victory of the neat.

In this poem is voiced the grievance of the farmer, the problems of agrarian America - the real crux of the Bryan campaign.

It is not surprising to find Lindsay an addirer of Lincoln. The poet played as a child in the grounds and about the house of the Lincoln home in Springfield. His youth was nourished on Lincoln legend and Lincoln history. He came to worship the spirit of the great emencipator. In The Litany of Washington Street he states that Lincoln came to prove that the grand style had nothing to do with the caste syster. - -"Lincoln came to prove that a soul can be magnificent, and prophetic, and democratic, and world-sweeping, and yet be born in the dust." 17. But, as so truly stated in Graham's Tramping with a Poet there are many people in America ready to turn their backs on the simple Abe Lincoln of Springfield. "He is too rough for them, too untidy, too raw. They would fain think of him as a man of aplomb, a man of a well-established family, one of the governing class. Lincoln's son, Robert, is oresident of the Pullman Car Company, and they would see the father in the son and surmise a family well-lined, well-warded, well-upholstered. In that class you can get to power, and be carried there, and sleep on the way. Belong to that class and all is yours." 14. Lindsay, however, replies to this, "We've

13. Vachel Lindsay, The Liteny of Washington St.p. 27 14. Stephen Graham, Opus cit., 2.203



no governing class. We've only got a class that thinks it is the governing class, but it is the most barren in the community, Lincoln's life shows the real truth. Any one who feels he has it in him can rise to the Presidency of the United States."

In one of Lindsay's most successful and beautiful poems he calls upon a warring world to bring "white peace" again so that the sorrowing spirit of Lincoln, disturbed by the sins of warlords, may sleep again upon its hill.

Among Lindsay's other heroes were Washington, Jefferson, and Theodore Roosevelt. Lindsay repeats frequently that he is a Jeffersonian and in a burst of rare acumen he states that "Thomas Jefferson has taken a thousand year lease on the United States of America thought - - - - The first thing to be noticed in an election campaign is the number of quotations from Jefferson used by the leaders of both parties to fortify whatever position they may take." In a burst of still rarer acumen, however, Lindsay states that "this is not a political article, and I do not think that I am smart enough to write one." 18. It is true that Lindsay's support of these men ras not because of their political standard, but the social reform for which they stood. As for Roosevelt, Lindsey said, "I was for him until the end of his Presidency. He refused to give business and high finance the first place, he would not talk the holy cospel of tariff, he made the White House a national

^{15.} Ibid., p.204

^{18.} Vachel Lindsay, "Abraham Lincoln Walks at Hidnight"

^{17.} Vachel Lindsay, The Litany of Maskington Street, p. 98

^{18.} Ibid., p.109



centre of culture, he gave a great progressive lead, and rallied to his banner the bright spirits of America; he hit the shams and the trusts and the frauds; he stood by the negro; he was not afraid to express what he thought on any subject under the sun; he did not halt between yes and no, and he was the very opposite of the Adams type of politician." 19.

And we have the long poem Roosevelt, written for the Illinois State Teacher's Association, in which Roosevelt is glorified.

"He hated a coward, he hated a fool,
He knew that money is always a fool,

He hated the paste-board, the smeary, the fake.

Te know he would always bark out the truth.
He loved the curious political game: —
But we know he loved better:-truth, God, and youth.

Join hands, poets, friends, companions! Let us start a new world on the Roosevelt code!

Despite Vachel Lindsay's preoccupation with America, he was a staunch supporter of world brotherhood and a fellow-ship of nations. In all his work we see mention of this belief - in his prose writing as well as in his poetry. In "The Wedding of the Rose, and the Lotus," a poem distributed to both houses of Congress on the opening day of the Panama-Pacific Exposition, there is symbolically presented the friendship of Tast and West, and an intination of the happy result of the blending of the two cultures. Perhaps the best expression of his desire for world brotherhood is to be found in

^{19.} Stephen Graham, O. us cit., p. 169



"Sew the Flags Together." This poem holds a trace of the communistic call to the workers of the world to unite, to "sweep over every monument of caste, smash over every high imperial wall that stands against the New World State. It is in reality, however, a plea to the youth of the world to "sew the flags together," to conquer hate and "make blood-brothers of us all," to unite and establish in the name of God the "United States of Europe, Asia, and the World."

We would expect a man of Lindsay's nature to be for a world brotherhood of man - it is the natural belief for a man who so understandingly studied and wrote of the Negro and of the Indian and who so genuinely deplored the plaque of the race question in America and the race riots in his own state of Illinois.

A promoter of the brotherhood of man is of necessity a hater of var and Vachel Lindsay was a pacifist. A prophet of beauty could not be otherwise. "A Curse of Kings" and "The Unpardonable Sin" empress a violent hatred of all who are in anyway responsible for the slaughter of var; kings, munition makers, diplomats - all feel the poet's scathing chastisement. Genuine emotion finds empression in vivid vords to lash those in power who, no matter what the plea, promote this "furious fratricide" and pervert the constructive powers of Science to destruction; cursed are the sleek landlords and the "fidling, twickling diplomats" who make the world their game of cards and cause the death of millions at "turning of a hair." The

"unpardonable sin" is to speak of bloody power as right divine and to kill in the name of Mercy and Religion.

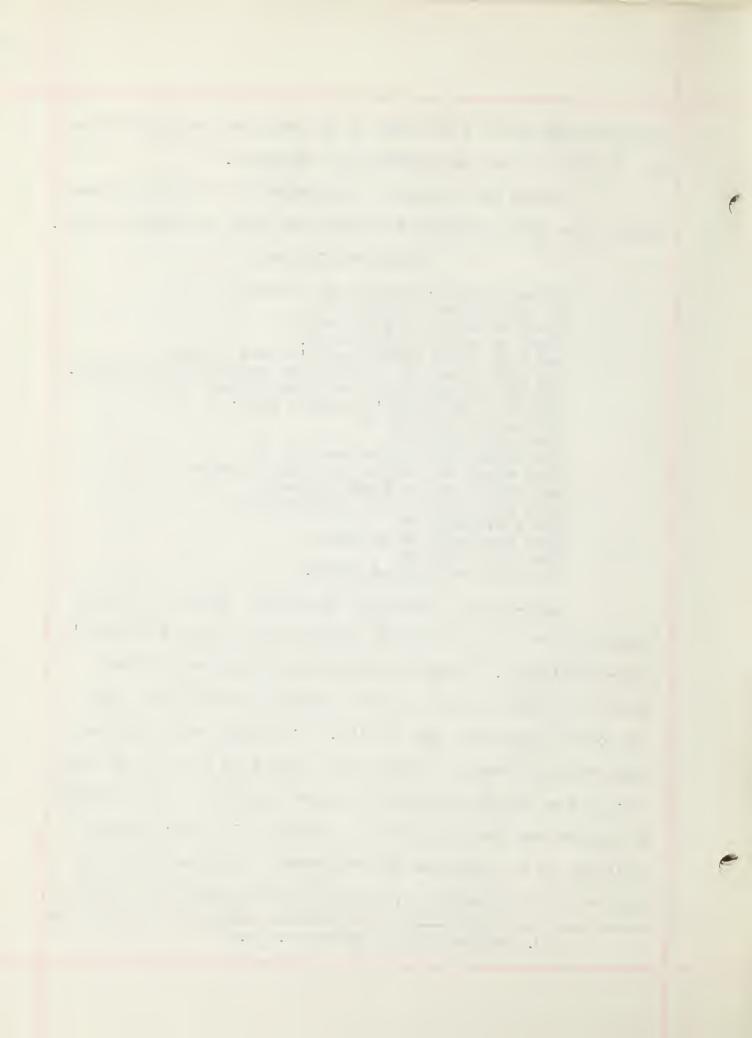
"Three Red Indians," in contrast, is a quiet expression of the ultimate peace for which the poet confidently hopes.

Three Red Indians

Three Indians stood beside a creek, In the Spokane valley-land, Their medicine bows and arrows Waved above the purple sand. And they heard Chief Joseph's last retreat, Red chosts went by through the apples and the wheat. And the stream turned to blood beneath their feet, The Blood of Joseph's ancient band; And one of them said, "The stain will go When rivers of battle never flow, Then every sea smokes the pipe of peace And every captive finds release, When only winds of friendship blow, The stain will go Then the world is at rest, The stain will go When the world is at beace."

Anti-saloon, anti-race prejudice, anti-war - Vachel Lindsay to be sure - but more characteristic yet was Lindsay's anti-materialism. Stephen Graham says of Lindsay, "I have rarely met such a rebel against vulgarity, materialism, and the modern artificial way of life." Lindsay saw money and the worship of money spoiling many aspects of the life of America; he saw the moving picture corporation failing in integrity of purpose because they were on a "financial orgy"; he saw the influence of the magazine advertisement - "praise of dollars and the implication that everything in the world has a commer-

^{20.} Stephen Graham, Opus cit., p.v



cial value or it has no value"; 21. and he had experienced himself the sparing charity of the institutions of paid organizers of charity. "I don't think," said Vachel, "that this money incentive is really a strong one or leads far. That is where I part company with the radicals of this country. They have all founded their faith on the economic theory of history. I believe in the romantic theory; I do not believe in the economic theory." And this use of the word romantic seems to be the key to Lindsay's whole social philosophy and one which ties to his gospel of beauty. It is the romance of life that the money lenders are missing; it is the blindness to beauty created by the machine of materialism which is constituting the tragedy of America.

The thing that eats the rotting stars
On the black sea-beach of shame
Is a giant spider's deathless soul
And Mammon is its name.

The thing that heals Hell's prison bars, And heals the sea of shame, Is a fragile butterfly's great soul And beauty is its name. 23.

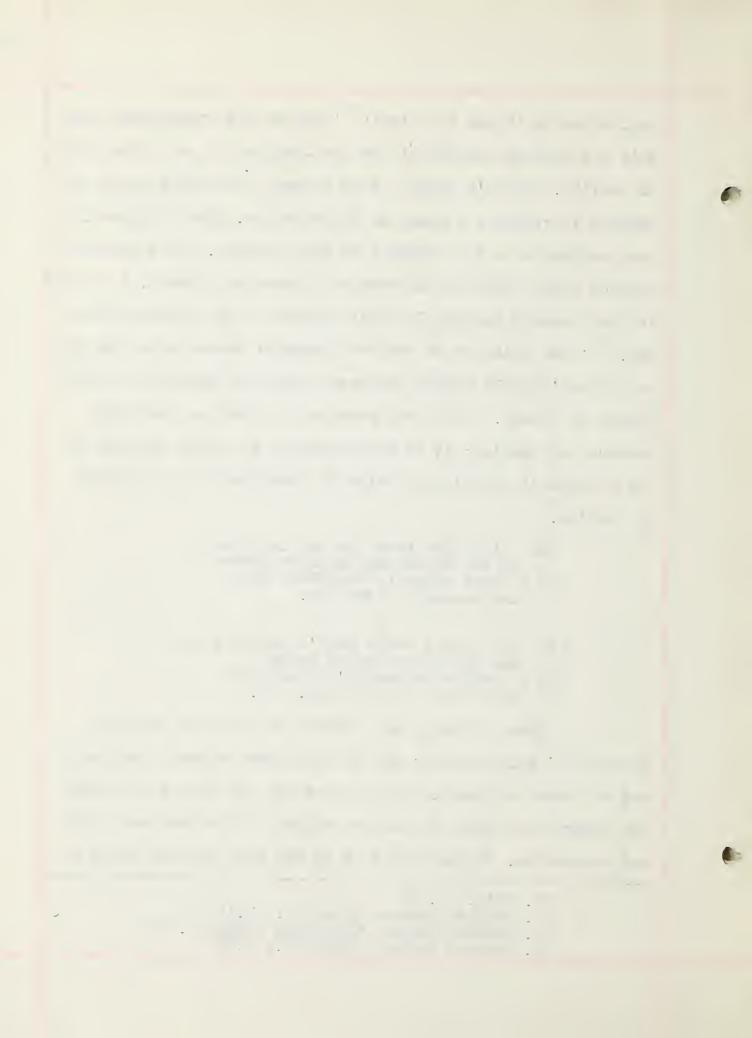
"Bread, beauty, and freedom is all that war requires," 24. said Lindsay; and he might have added, "the greatest of these is beauty." For Lindsay was not afraid of hunger and poverty and want, of the privations of the body and physical starvation. The man who took to the road with no money in

^{21.} Ibid., p.130

^{22.} Stephen Graham, opus cit., p.123

^{23.} Vachel Lindsay, Collected Poems, p. 366

^{24.} Stephen Graham, opus cit., p.93

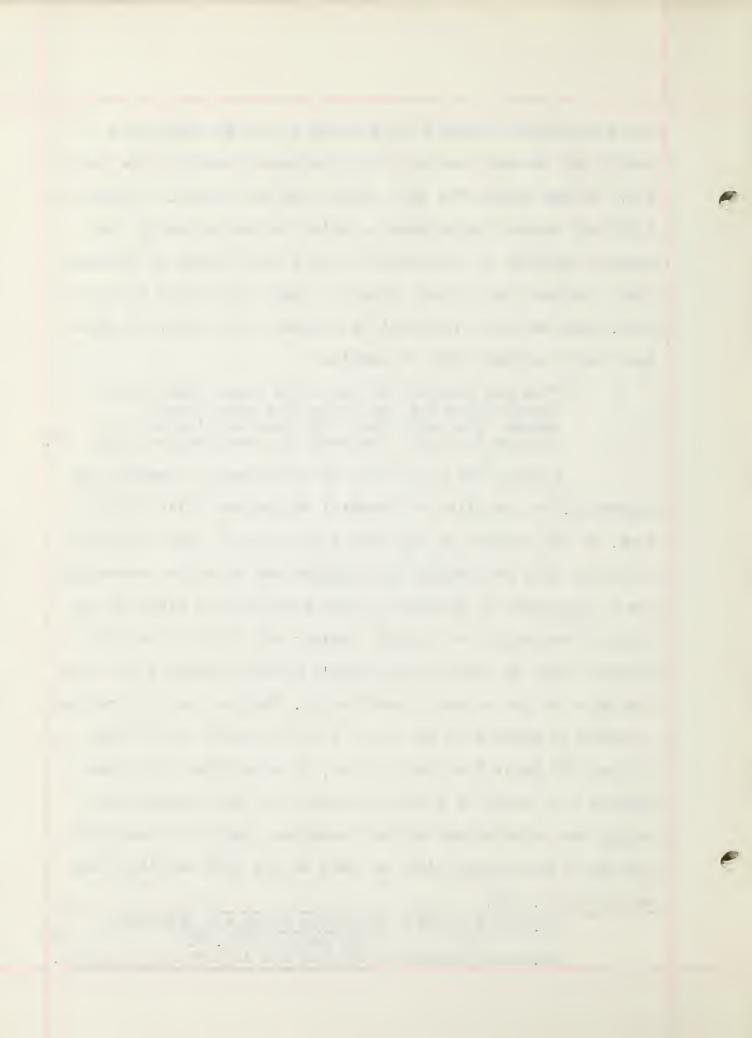


his pockets and traveled the country to preach beauty and purity and decency was not crying for more bread for the masses. He was crying for more beauty for the people. It was the spiritual Starvation of America which he saw darkening the splendid surface of the country like a heavy cloud of destruction. We must not forget, however, that Lindsay was an optimist. Here we have no cynical bitterness, but great, resplendent faith in the future of America.

Tis not too late to build our young land right, Cleaner than Holland, courtlier than Japan, Devout like early Rome with hearths like hers, Hearths that will recreate the breed called man.

Lindsay was both blind and visionary as someone has suggested. He was blind to temporal things and alive to horizons. He who studies to any extent the work of this sensitive visionary must sympathize with Loggins who says that searching for a philosophy in Lindsay is like searching in Blake or the Book of Revelation for logical system; and he may agree with Lewisohn when he says that Lindsay's mental processes are like the peace of God - past understanding. Despite the difficulties involved in separating the chaff from the wheat in his work, in culling the logic from the visions, in separating fact from fantasy - in spite of the difficulties, we are rewarded in making the acquaintance of the "careless singer of democracy" who went "adventuring with one hand on his lyre and the other on his sword." 26.

^{25.} Vachel Lindsay, Collected Poems, "To Reformers in Despair," p. 335 (93 26. Louis Untermeyer, The New Era in American Poetry, p.



Life is sometimes paradoxical. Lindsay eventually entered the very life he had preached against. The house doors ultimately gave way to stages, and the stages to huge auditoriums. We can but feel, however, that he remained at heart the same Lindsay, and we can but join with him in his plea for a better America:

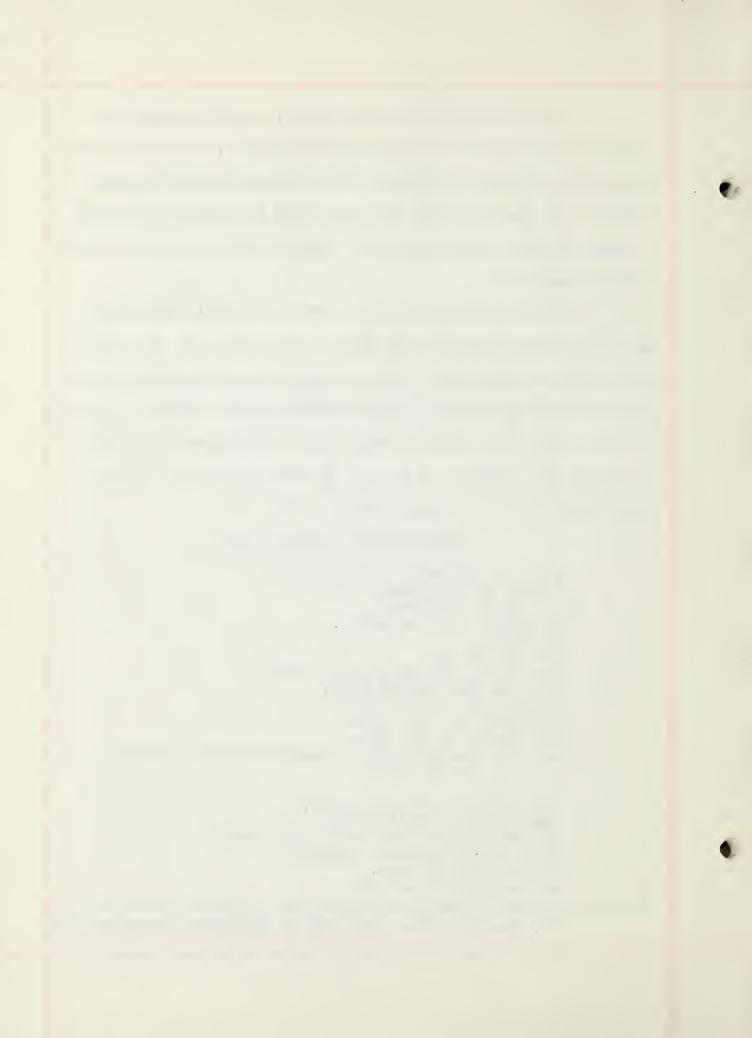
"Let us realize that whatever America's tomorrow may be, she shall have a day that is beautiful and not crass, spiritual, not material. Let us resolve that she shall dream dreams deeper than the sea and higher than the clouds of heaven, that she shall come forth crowned and transfigured with her statesmen and wigards and saints and saces about her, with 27. magic behind her and miracle before her."

A High-School National Song

This is the song we would sing:
"Glory to this land,
Let glory be given
By every voice and hand.
We Abhor
The cry of war,
The strut, the pride, the hate."
This is the song we sing:
"Let Beauty be the State,
Let Peace be the State,
Let Wisdom be the State,
Let the Wonder and the thunder of Great Music
pe the State.

Man marched west from Asia,
Hunting the world's soul
And we are near the end of the west,
Have almost touched the goal.
Let us find it here.
Let us build a nation

^{27.} Vachel Lindsay, The Art of the Moving Picture, n288



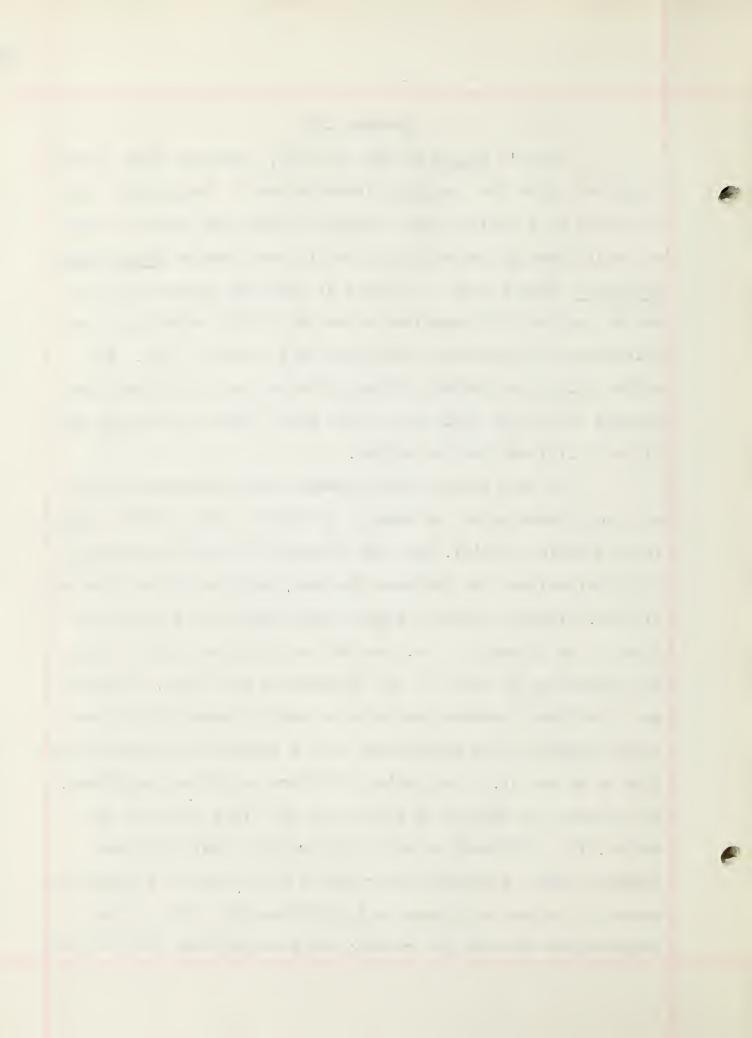
Where Wonder is the deep of it, And Peace its best creation, Wonder that comes from Labor, Peace that comes from art. Peace that comes from prayer, Thile the Mation sets apart, All its Youth for glory. All its Youth for Beauty: Counting the years In trees kept green, And girls and boys taught noble duty. Counting the years by highways white, And towers that magnify the night, While skylark Youth, All wings, uplifts its flight Through Dawns of new delight, Singing and ringing on and on:-Let Beauty be the State, Let Peace be the State, Let Wisdom be the State, Let the Wonder and the thunder of Great Music be the State, Let the Wonder and the thunder of Great Singing be the State.



Chapter III

Reedy's Mirror of May 29, 1914, contained four lyrics published under the pseudonym "Webster Ford." These poems were the first in a series which continued weekly for nearly a year and which were ultimately published in book form as Spoon River Anthology. This volume - a series of epitaphs supposedly written by the dead of themselves - was one of the outstanding contributions to the realism which was in the air in 1914. Its author, Edgar Lee Masters, although he was born in Kansas, was brought up from an early age in the small torms of Illinois and it is of Illinois that he writes.

It is a far cry from Lindsay, the sensitive, visionary, and chaste priest of beauty, to Masters, the cynical, ruthless, Freudian realist. Both men belonged to the "Main Street group" of writers who pictured the small middle-western town or village. Lindsay, however, seeing Main Street as it was, pictured it as it ought to be. Masters, on the other hand, seeing Main Street as it ought to be, pictured it as it was. Lindsay was a reformer; Masters was not - he merely turned the microscopic powers of his observation with a scientific coldness upon life as he saw it. The problem of reform he did not undertake. He suggested no methods of correcting the evils which he unveiled. Yet, different as were their methods, both of these Illinois poets, thoroughly American in spirit and in expression, wrote of the American scene in the Middle-Mest; both saw and acknowledged the need for reform; and both believed that at the

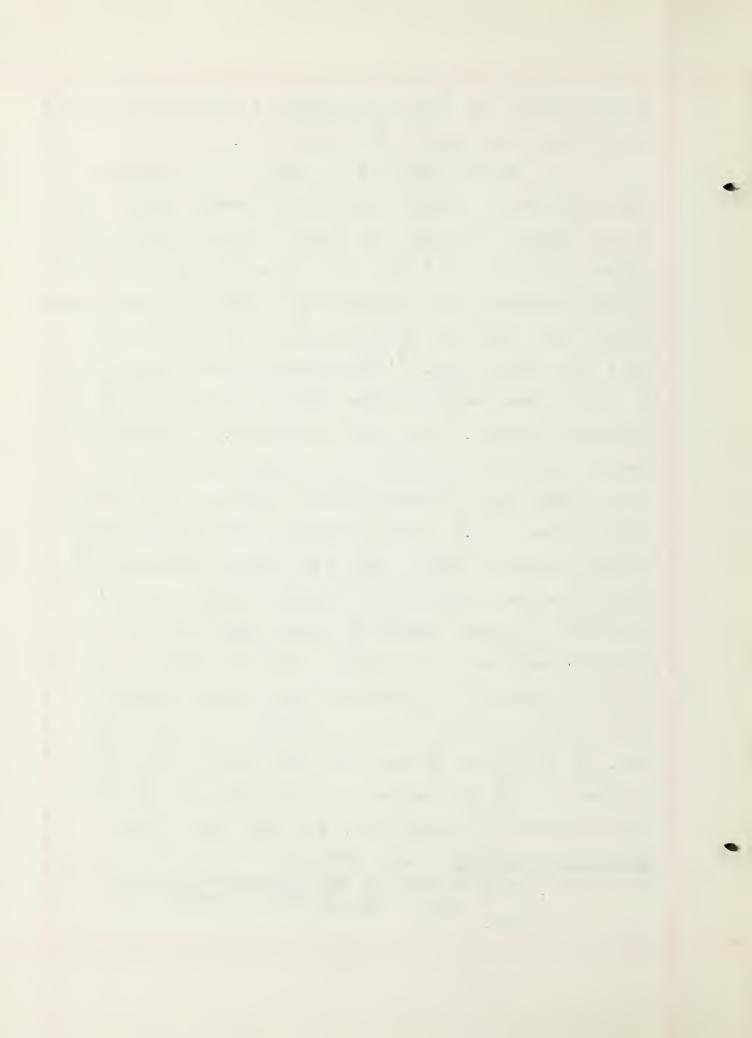


root of the evil lay a kind of spiritual stagnation, a gradual decay of the finer aspects of American life.

Mr. Masters disclaims membership in any literary group, such as the "Chicago school" or a "revolt - from - the village" group, yet he has been placed in both of these categories by critics. He flatly states, however, that as a writer he has no relationships. He denies any interest in modern poets claiming that "they have no principles, no individuality, no moral code and no roots." 1. Then asked what his own roots were. Mr. Masters once responded: "The America of Jefferson - of Jeffersonian democracy. I date back a long time. I believe in an America that is not imitative, that stands alone, that is strong, that leans on nothing outside itself and permits nothing to lean on it." A. Here, at least, is an issue on which Lindsay and Masters might concur - both avoved supporters of the Jeffersonian principles of democracy. Vachel Lindsay's admiration of Abraham Lincoln as another creat leader of our democratic America is not, however, shared by Edgar Lee Masters who bitterly opposes the socalled "Lincoln myth," arruing that Lincoln was hypocritical, slow-witted, vindictive, and cold. It would seen, perhaps, that this latter opinion of Mr. Masters might be a product of a senescent mind. Otherwise it is difficult to emplain one of the finer poets of the Spoon River Anthology - "Anne Rutled e."

^{1.} Robert Von Gelder, The New York Times Book Review, Feb. 15, 1942

^{2.} Ibid.

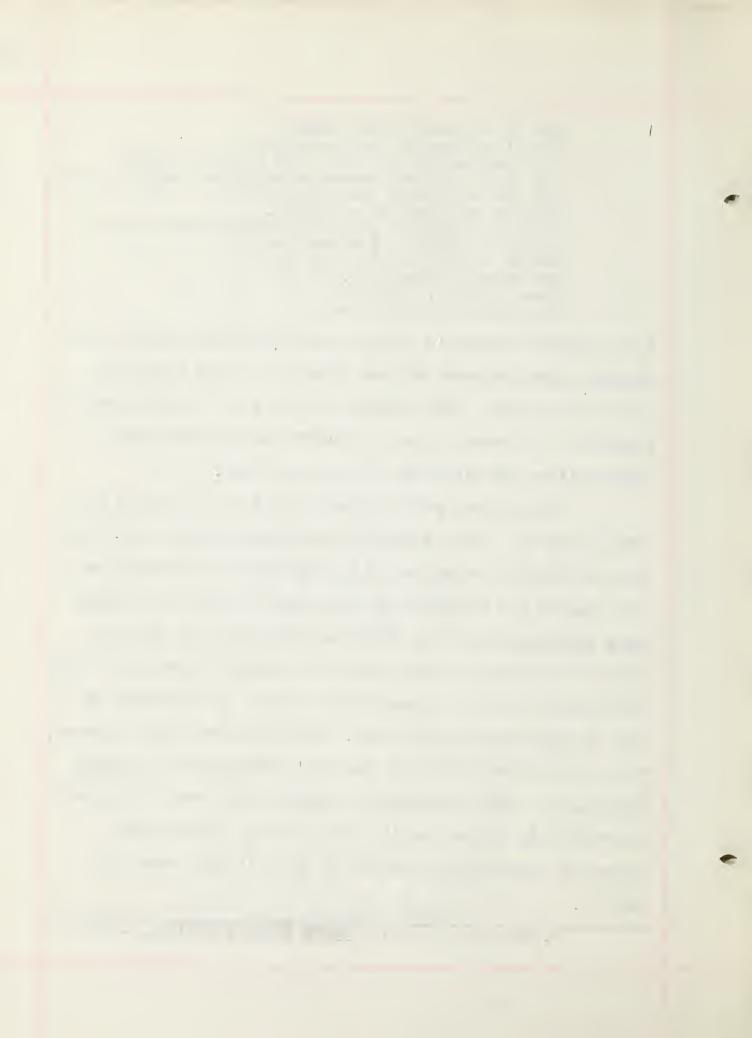


Out of me unworthy and unknown
The vibrations of deathless music;
"With malice toward none, with charity for all."
Out of me the forgiveness of millions toward millions,
And the beneficent face of a nation
Shining with justice and truth.
I am Anne Rutledge who sleep beneath these weeds,
Beloved in life of Abraham Lincoln,
Wedded to him, not through union,
But through separation.
Bloom forever, O Republic,
From the dust of my bosom.

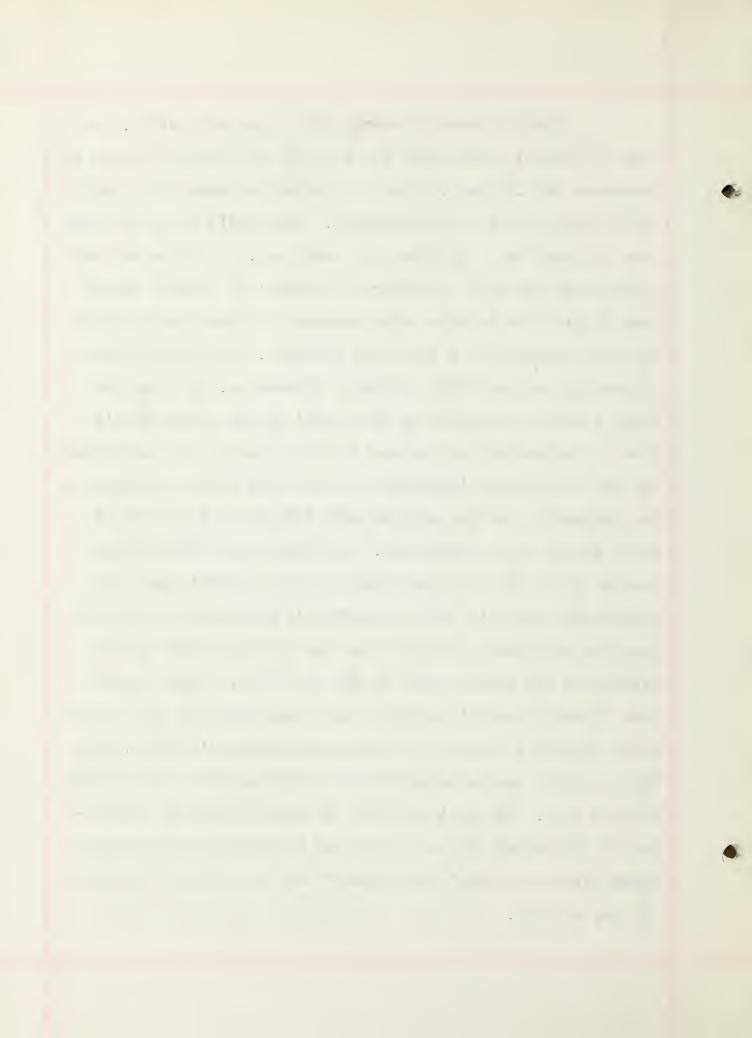
This product of Master's earlier pen seems more worthy of his judgment than the somewhat sour remark of a more recent day concerning Lincoln. The twelve-line lyric is a masterpiece of suggestion - a woman, a man, a country characterized and spiritualized and vitalized in one short poem!

into his works - that it was the spiritual darkness which had come upon America crucified by consequences of industrialism that haunted him and fired him with poetic challenge. Spoon River Anthology retold in tombstone monologue what had happened to the frontier which had once inspired Whitman and Twain with hope and vision. However this may be, the statement as to lack of sun is undoubtedly true. One who takes pains, however, to acquaint himself with Mr. Masters' autobiography - Across Sooon River - might justifiably conclude that some of the dark and melancholy in the poet's work is due to his own background and personality, and not to the spiritual decay of America.

^{3.} Edgar Lee Masters, Spoon River Anthology, p. 219



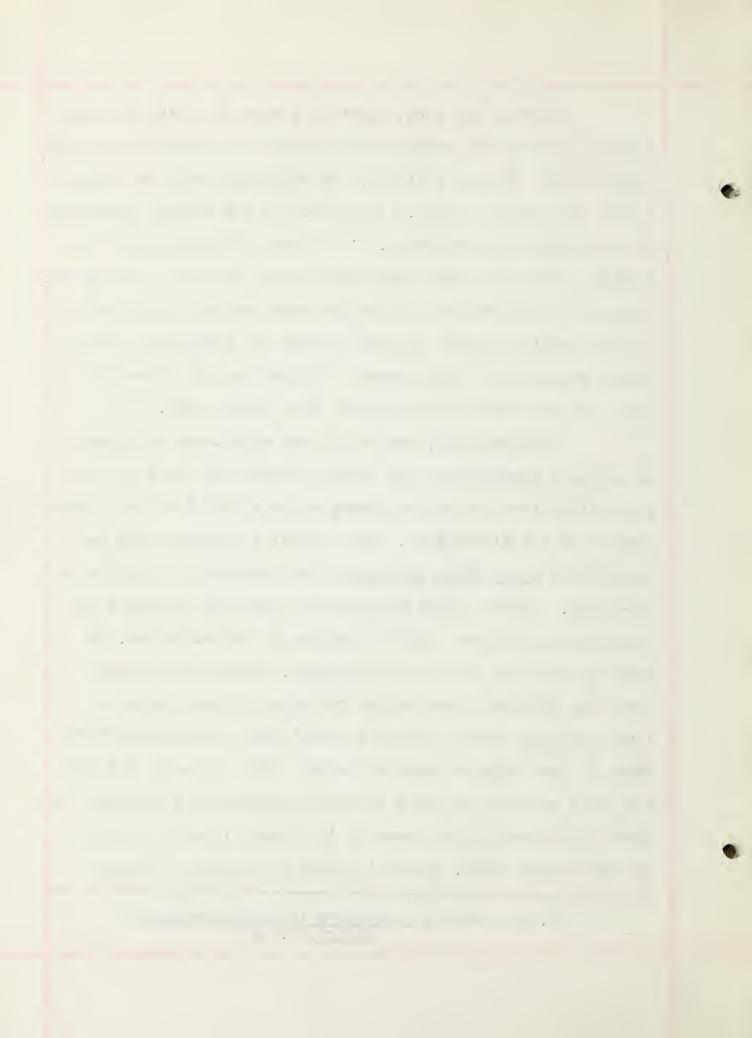
Masters comes of a strdy and pioneering stock. His line of descent traces from New England to Virginia, thence to Tennessee and Illinois. From his father he inherited vitality and a certain nervous restlessness. The poet's youth does not seem to have been a particularly happy one. He writes of drab, dirty towns and ugly, unattractive houses; of unhappy school days in district schools where teachers "without personality" were mere drudges in a thankless business. He knew the pinch of poverty and the trial of family dissension. In a happier vein, however, he writes of days spent on his grandfather's farm, of extensive reading much enjoyed, and of the understanding and stimulating influence of one of his school teachers, a New Englander, who may perhaps have been the inspiration of Emily Sparks of the Anthology. His life and later writing were no doubt greatly conditioned by his youthful years in Petersburg where his father, as state's attorney was busy prosecuting desperate characters who had grown up there in the disordered and lawless days of the Civil War. Their crimes were offenses against property, and, once released from prison, these criminals would seek revenge upon Masters! father. Thus the boy early became acquainted with the unlovely side of this village life. The poet reflects the temperament and philosoohy of the father who was a Democrat by nature and conviction, whose liberalism was "rock-ribbed," and who believed firmly in the joy of life.



Masters the poet, yearning always to write, was the victim of the social system which forced him to take up various jobs in order to earn a living. He eventually went to Chicago to get away from monotony. "The pathos of the country depressed my imagination indescribably." But even the city failed to fill the void which constantly made itself evident in his heart. Neither his law profession, nor his numerous sex experiences, nor his marriage appear to have brought him happiness. Apparently, something of this personal frustration and discontent found its way into the writings of this lawyer-poet.

Masters, then, out of his own emperience developed an infinite sympathy for the cramped monotonous lives of the ugly little towns which had sprung up as a result of the urbanization of the Middle-West. The realistic picture which he presents in Spoon River Anthology errs, however, in that it is one-sided. Masters deals predominantly with the tragedies of Spoon River and gives little attention to the successes. He seems preoccupied with sex and disease. Prostitutes, drunkards, and criminals pass across the pages in such poems as "Georgine Land Miner," "Rosie Roberts" and "Learcy Foote." For some of these unfortunates the reader feels contempt, but for the great majority he feels a kind of irresistible sympathy for these creatures who are drawn by the force of society into the web and caught there. Masters' social philosophy included a

^{4.} Amy Lowell, <u>Tendencies in Modern American</u>
<u>Poetry</u>, p.152

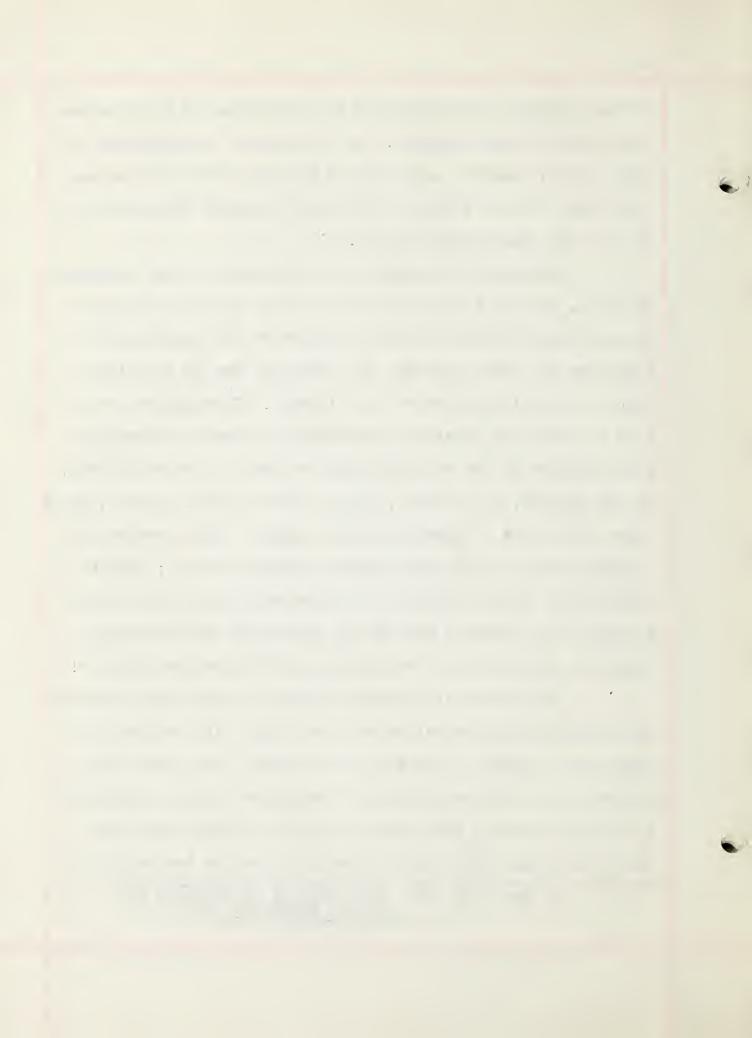


strong belief in the freedom of the individual to live his own life, and to find happiness. As an antidote to Puritanism in art, morals, manners, and religion the poet offers "Freudian psychology and its ideal of obedience to rather than repression of our fundamental desires." 5.

Although the reader may be sickened by this emphasis on Freud, ser and satisfaction of desires, he may yet admire the philosophy which concerns the right of the individual to happiness and which laments our inadequate use of the riches which a full life places at our disposal. Furthermore, we do feel sympathy for those who had unhappy, narrow, constrained lives because of the arbitrary code set up by a stern society. We are touched, for example, by the pathos of Mr. and Mrs. Bliss whose family led a warped and cold, unhappy life, because the minister and the judge both advised against divorce; and we question the sacred wisdom of the Reverend Wiley who, having preached four thousand sermons and conducted forty revivals, treasures as his finest deed saving the Blisses from divorce!

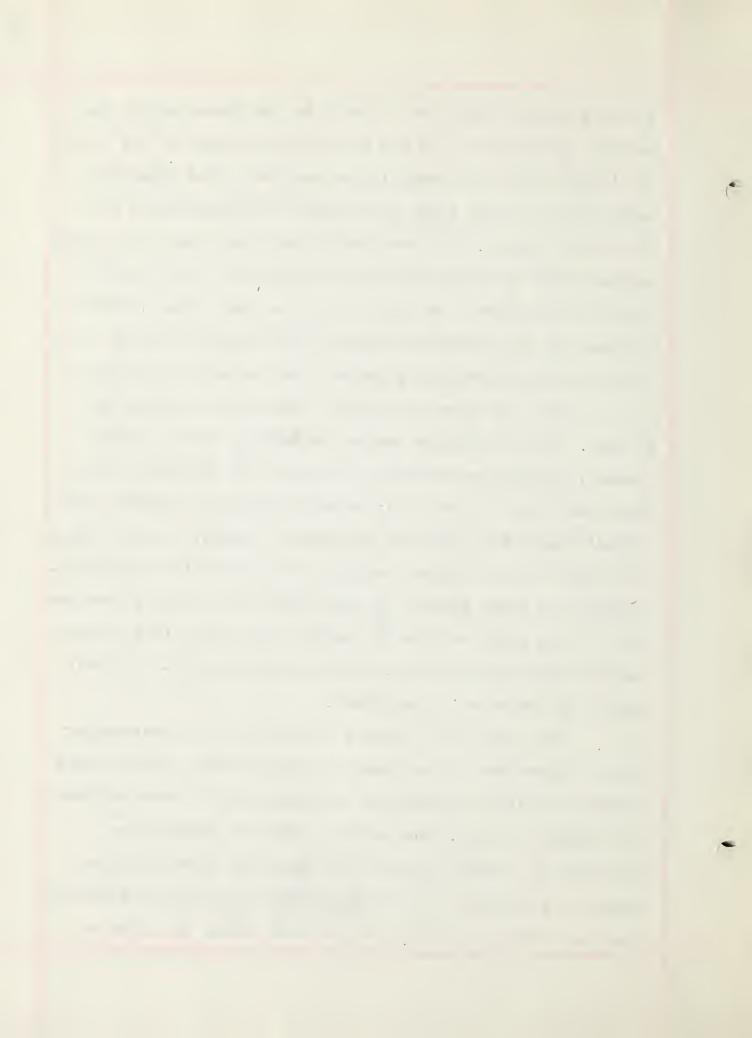
With Masters' satirical attack on greed and hypocrisy in business and political as well as social life, we can but sympathize. There is Hod Putt, for example, who almost convinces us that his acquisition of wealth by robbing a traveler is no more unlawful than that of old Bill Piersol who grew rich from trading with the Indians and from the bankrupt law.

^{5.} Bruce Weirick, From Whitman to Sandburg in American Poetry, p. 196



There is Deacon Taylor who belonged to the church and to the party of prohibition, but who died from cirrhosis of the liver; he slipped behind the prescription counter of the drugstore every day for thirty years and enjoyed a generous drink of "Spiritus frumenti." We hear the Circuit Judge admit to having decided cases on the points the lawyers scored, not upon the right of the matter. We look with horror upon John M. Church, attorney for the Indemnity Company which insured the mine workers who oulled wires with judge and jury to beat the claims of the cripoled, the widow and orphan; and thereby he made his fortune. There is Editor Whedon, perverting truth, selling scandal, crushing reputations, to assert his own power, make money, and save his own life; or Ralph Rhodes, who wrecked his father's bank with his loans to dabble in wheat, but who did it as a cover for the father, because of the latter's church relationship: or Hiram Scates, the politician who sold his services first to one party and then to another, and left his followers and idealists disillusioned. A vivid picture here - a roque's gallery of Democracy's charlatans.

The pen of Mr. Masters writes with an understanding touch of those who are oppressed by the economic system, whose youthful ideals are crushed by the remorseless stress and need for earning a living. Such are Dr. Siegfried Iseman, the physician who desired to carry the Christian creed into the practice of medicine, but who found that to carry the Christian creed and wife and children on his back proved too heavy a



burden; Cooney Potter, who wore out his life and that of his family in an effort to add acres to his farm; Eugene Carman, whose fifty-dollar a-month-slavery in the store of Thomas Rhodes, who ran the church and the bank as well as the store, led to a frenzied rebellion resulting in his death.

Yet Edgar Lee Masters, with all his sympathy for the downtrodden, with all his passion for the freedom of the individual, does not champion the cause of the working man as does, for example, Carl Sandburg. There is a touch of bitter truth in the two poems, " John Hancock Otis" and "Anthony Findlay."

John Hancock Otis

As to democracy, fellow citizens, Are you not prepared to admit That I, Who inherited riches and was to the manner born. Was second to none in Spoon River In my devotion to the cause of Liberty? While my contemporary, Anthony Findlay, Born in a shanty and beginning life As a water carrier to the section hands, Then becoming a section hand when he was grown, Afterwards foreman of the gang, until he rose To the superintendency of the railroad, Living in Chicago, Was a veritable slave driver, Grinding the faces of labor And a bitter enemy of democracy. And I say to you, Spoon River, And to you, O republic, Beware of the man who rises to power From one suspender. 6.

Anthony Findlay

Both for the country and for the man, And for a country as well as a man 'Tis better to be feared than loved. And if this country would rather part

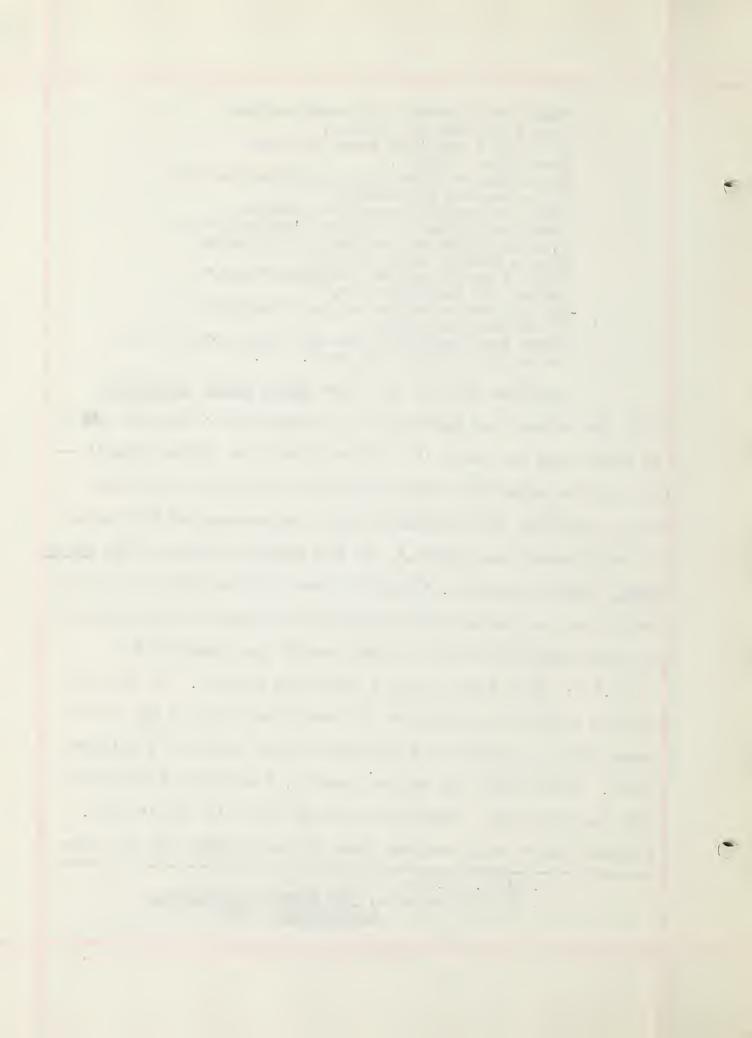
6. Edgar Lee Masters, Sooon River Anthology, 3.123

With the friendship of every nation Than surrender its wealth, I say of a man 'tis worse to lose Money than friends. And I rend the curtain that hides the soul Of an ancient aspiration: When the people clamor for freedom They really seek for pover o'er the strong, I, Anthony Findlay, rising to greatness From a humble water carrier, Until I could say to thousands "Come," And say to thousands "Go," Affirm that a nation can never be good, Or achieve the good, Where the strong and the wise have not the rod To use on the dull and weak.

Lewisohn says of the first Spoon River Anthology
that the purpose was descriptive and revelatory; Masters sought
to "tell what lay under 'the false chronicles of the stones'--the furtive animalisms under the outer austerities, the foul
small tyrannies that smothered life, the unexampled falseness
of both thought and action." In the second Anthology, New Spoon
River, Masters accuses. "What had been private hypocrisy in the
nation had now become public law and to pressure of mob opinion
had been added the force of open cruelty and unendurable
wrong." Some This seems to be a justified comment. We find in
the new anthology quantities of poems like those of the first
Spoon River - records of the tragedies and misfits of private
lives. There does seem to be, however, increasing impatience
with the hypocrisy, greed, and lust of those in public life.
Tobetson the Plumber wonders where is the plumber who can make

^{7.} Ibid., p.124

^{8.} Ludwig Lewisohn, The Story of American Literature, p. 489



Spoon River "clean of ignorance, and cruelty, and the money lust, that colors its yellow bacterial plots with pulpit spewed morality." Olaf Lindblom, an "editor of the new era," fights against saloons and gambling houses and crime waves, but is himself secretly engaged in land thefts, and is a friend to the private cellar, the back room of the bank. Diamandi Viktoria admits that his people came to America to live in a land of liberty, but Diamandi himself grew up in the U.S.A., in metropolized Spoon River, and he saw "that the thing is money, money, and the gift of gab for liberty." So he was elected county treasurer and amassed quite a roll and maintains that "You can fool all the people part of the time - and that is enough."

Then there are the war poems, which apparently reflect Masters' opposition to the Spanish American War and his understanding and loathing of the social, economic, and political forces behind our entry into the World War. Robert Oven cries out of a "nation out of its mind and led to a war with shouts for God, to find it was only the Devil's mask." 10.

"Unknown Soldiers" expresses the same thought in vivid terseness:

Stranger! Tell the people of Spoon River two things:

First that we lie here, obeying their words;

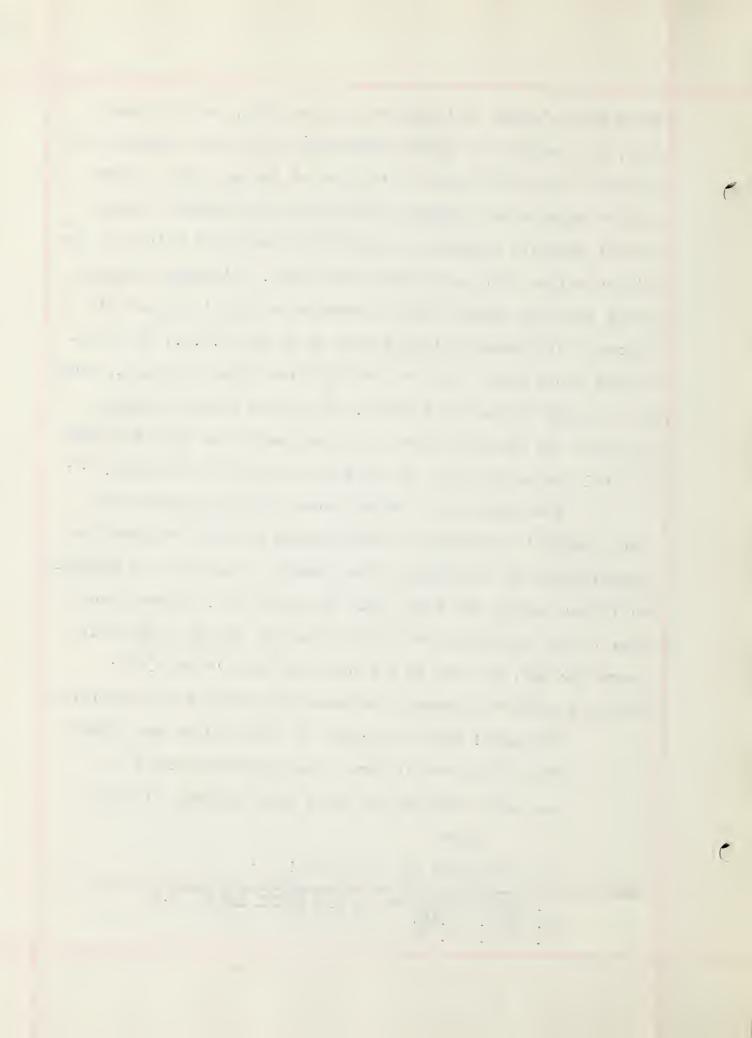
And next that had we known what was back of their words

We should not be lying here! 11.

O. Edgar Lee Lasters, New Spoon River, 9.66

^{10.} Ibid., p.167

^{11.} Ibid., p. 52



All the bitterness and invective comes to a climan in the words of the Civil War veteran Col. John Clary.

Col. John Clary

After my sacrifices in the war for the Union,
Then to live to the day of the Great War.
To lie for days in a delirium, and out of thought
And suffering to see that monster ravage the land,
With a mouth like the Grand Canyon,
Swallowing churches, swallowing colleges,
Halls, as well as tons of newspapers,
Tons of books.
To hear him short like a storm
As he trampled Liberty into the mire,
While mouthing moralities, patriotisms,
His throat full of bells, pipe organs, the booming
of cannon.

You call this a Republic,
Where happiness is hunted, delight is defeated,
Thought is throttled, speech is choked:
And where slickness, lying, thieving, hypocrisy
Are encouraged and enforced by the Great Beast?
And where Dullness the eunuch, is enthroned
Amusing himself by swatting flies
With a scepter of lead! 12.

Much of the work of Masters is repetitious. The reader opens the volume entitled <u>The Great Valley</u> and finds in such poems as "Handing the Picture" and "winston Prairie" the same criticism of the falsifiers and charlatans in places of public trust. "Come Republic" is a plea to the United States to throw out its chest, lift up its head, and be free, independent and brave; it is a lament for America's loss of neutrality and of spiritual independence, of her "setting up a Federal judge in China scrambling for a place in the Orient, and stealing the Philippine Islands." 13.

^{12.} Ibid., p.163

^{13.} Edgar Lee Masters, The Great Valley, p.72



Songs and Satires brings us "The Loop" and "The City;"

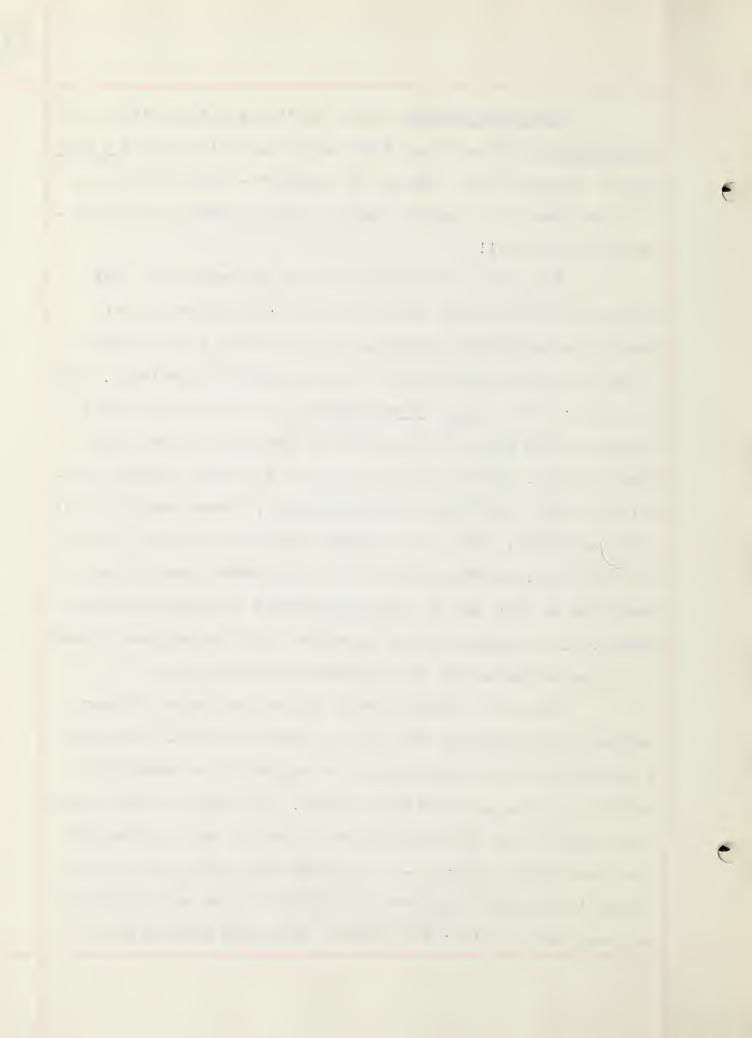
Starved Rock, "Chicago" and "The Christian Statesman;" The Open

Sea, "A Republic" and "God and My Country" - all dealing with

the same theme in a similar manner. Graft, greed, corruption
they are all there!

It would not be fair to leave the reader with the impression that Masters recognizes no saving grace in love, loyalty and spiritual strength, that he denies the existence of any idealists or of honest, loyal, patriotic Americans. This is not so; for in Spoon River Anthology we do have such fine figures as Doc Hill, Lucinda Matlock, Archibald Higbee, and Fiddler Jones. We do have here, and in the other volumes, honest clergymen like Father Alan Drinkwater, honest men in public life, and loyal, clean, law-abiding American citizens. And, to be fair to Mr. Masters, each of his characters, good or bad, runs true to type and is a living portrait of flesh and blood people. It is simply in the aggregate that the balance is lost by a super-abundance of the unpleasant personalities.

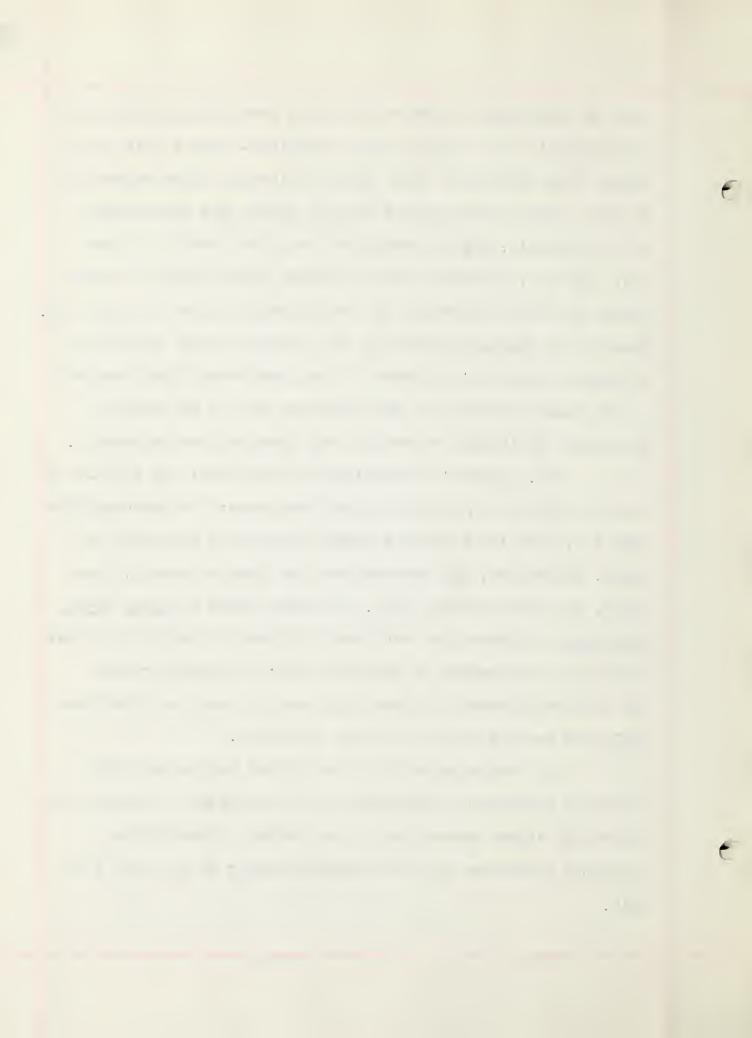
Edgar Lee Masters, fully as much as Vachel Lindsay, reflects the America of the time in which he lived. Two great influences upon his life pattern he admits to be Spoon River and the agrarian movement under Bryan. The former - those early days spent in the hideous ugliness, physical and spiritual, of the Spoon River vicinity - lent to his philosophy that strong belief in the need for every individual to find satisfaction and happiness in life; the latter - the great attempt on the



part of the frontier West to fight the encroaching domination of the East's big business and monopolies - lent to his philosophy that democratic ardor which in 1898 and 1900 caused him to take up the fight against what he termed the imperialism of the Republic. Masters reflects, too, the ideals of those who, with him, believed that the United States took the wrong course when she intervened in the European affairs of 1914-1918. Some of the characteristics of the post-war social trends can be found in Masters' interest in the psycho-analytical method; in the frank depiction of sex problems; and in the emphasis on greater individual expression and freedom from repression.

Mr. Masters' limitations are admitted: his failure to see that misery can ennoble as well as cramp; his preoccupation with sex, with the resultant coarse and morbid chronicle of rapes, seductions, and perversions; the lack of warmth, love, color, joy and spiritual life. Yet such books as Soon River Anthology did serve the beneficent purpose of turning the spotlight upon the cankers of American life; of jolting rudely the smug complacency of those Americans who were so blind they would not see the faults of their democracy.

It was principally against these narrow and selfrighteous patterns of respectability that Masters directed his
satire, and "Emmet Burns," one of the better lyrics of the
Anthology, empresses well the sincere feeling of the poet himself.



Emmett Burns

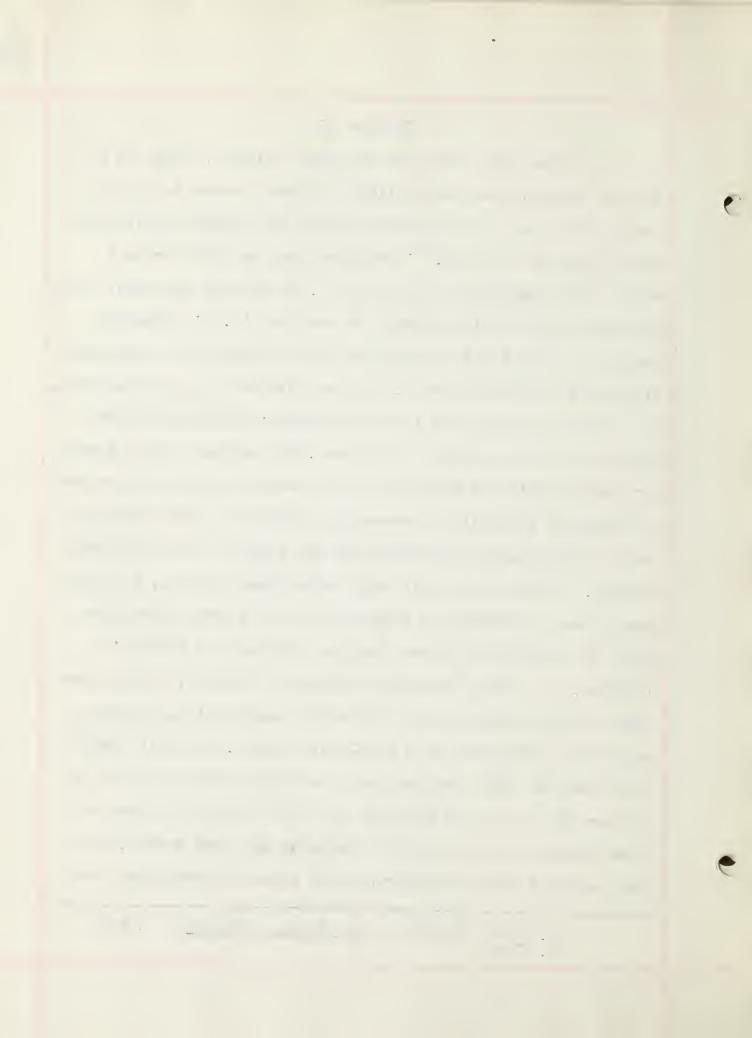
Passer-by! Do you know who are the slickest
schemers,
And the most excellent despots?
They are those who say, this is right and this
is wrong,
And who ascend the throne of what they call the
right,
And then hedge the right with a law.
Is there no way to beat these shallow souls?
Follow me, passer-by:
Be young, be wise,
Be indifferent to good and evil,
And the laws they make Seek only the truth,
And die!



Chapter IV

"One turns from the visionary Lindsay, blind to all but his vision, from the realistic Masters, awake to all but beauty, to a poet who combines reality and romance, truth and beauty, speech and song."1. Carl Sandburg is "the foremost singer the pioneer West has given us. He sums up the past, present, and future of the America he was born in." Sandburg was not, in his earlier years, an avowed adherent of any school of thought or social system. He was interested, as was Lindsov. in a world of better and fairer tomorrows; however he played the role not of reformer out of poet. His purpose was to speak out the thoughts and emotions of the people and his work voiced a triumphant faith in the essential rightness of the universe and in the ultimate vindication of the ideals of the American "People." There was in his work, says Bruce Weirick, "a large massiveness, a variety, a stirring that is vastly nearer the heart of things than either Masters' cynicism or Lindsay's optimism. - - - Big, lumbering, Swedish, amorphic, kindly, and crude, class-conscious, and violently humanitarian, Sandburg may best be described as a clay-footed Titan. With his elephantine hands he holds now the pen of an etcher whose work is in the cool blues of Lake Michigan or in the grim red flames of those furnaces that by night illuminate her dark waters. And then, wearied with the delicacies of color and restraint, he

^{1.}Alfred Kreymborg, Our Singing Strength, p. 385 2. Ibid.

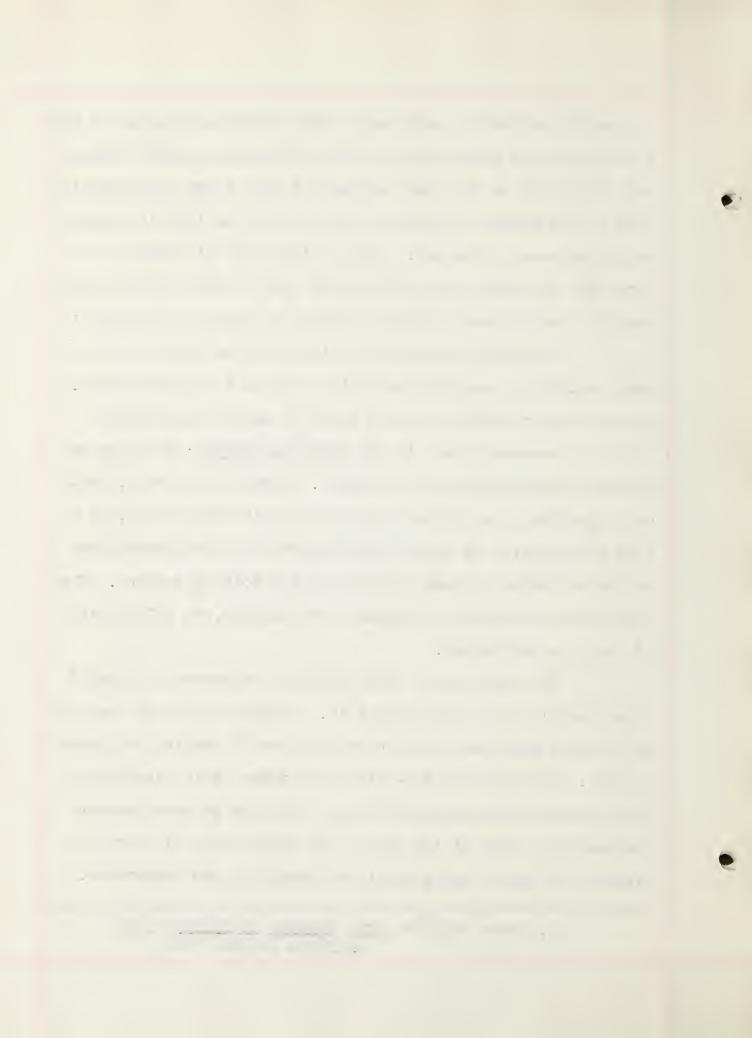


flings the pen aside, and stalks with Cyclopean steps about the little whirling streets of his city, flinging magnetic curses, and piling job on job, and pushing out with those big unheeding feet of his whatever delicate flower of art or life is unlucky enough to come in his way. Until, tired with his debauch of strength, the Titan feels contrition, and so goes all the more tenderly back to his skillful etchings in color and flame." 3.

Sandburg characterizes himself as an American folk song recitalist, and this is really true in a two-fold sense. The poet has recorded the folk songs of America and has put them into permanent form in <u>The American Songbag</u>; he sings and recites them throughout the country. Further than this, however, Sandburg, in writing poems of prairies and cities, of farm and factory, is really creating from his own experience and perpetuating in song the life of the folk of America. The word folk-song seems, in the case of Sandburg, to hold a kind of double significance.

The Americanism which Sandburg expresses he himself experienced; he did not inherit it. Although the poet was born and brought up in America, he was the son of Swedish immigrant farmers. Perhaps this two-fold inheritance, this blending of Norse ancestry and American living, explains in some measure the dual character of the poet - the combination of doer and dreamer, of mystic and realist, of brutality and tenderness.

^{3.} Bruce Weirick, From Whitman to Sandourg in American Poetry, p.210

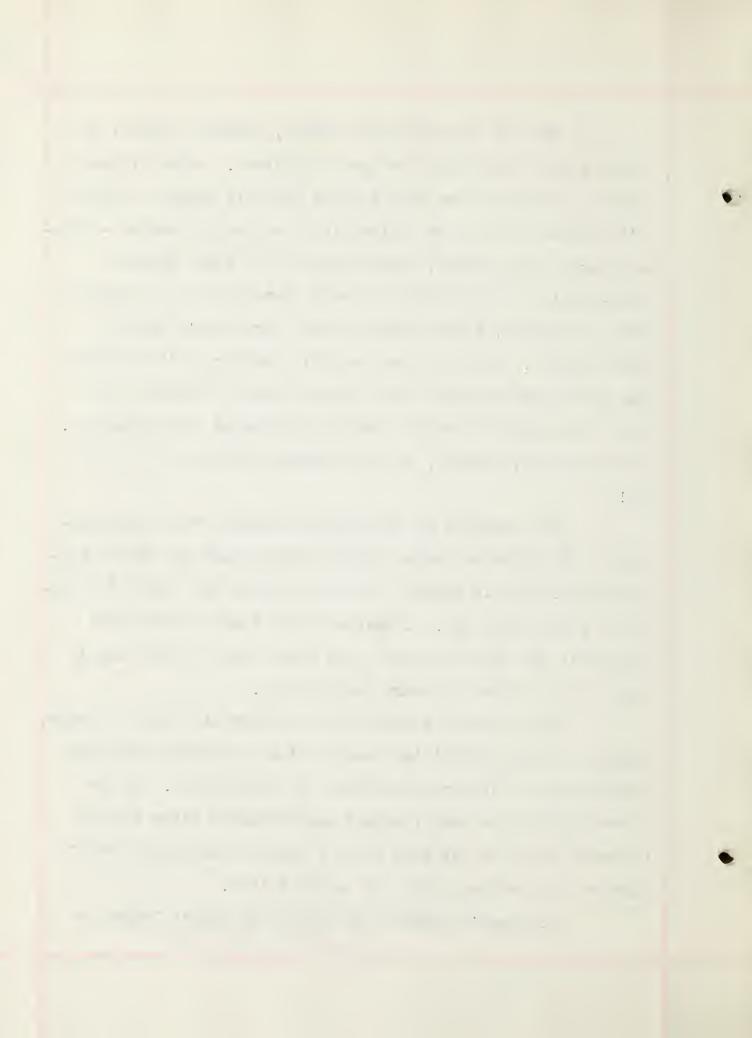


The son of uneducated parents, Sandburg himself attended school only until the age of thirteen. Here followed a
period in which he came into contact with all phases of America's working world as he shifted from one job to another - milkman, barber shop porter, scene-shifter in a cheap theater,
truck-handler in a brickyard, turner apprentice in a pottery,
hotel dishwasher, Kansas harvest hand, carpenter's helper,
stove-blacker. In the latter capacity Sandburg, like Lindsay,
went from house to house, but whereas Lindsay erchanged for
meals the gospel of beauty, Sandburg exchanged stove-blacking.
A telling clue, perhaps, to the essential natures of the two
men!

The outbreak of the Spanish American War found Sandburg in the fighting ranks, and its close found him with a hundred dollars in his pocket - a key to unlock the gates of learning at Lombard College. In spite of the fact that the poet worked his way through college, he found time to write and to work on its various literary publications.

In the years immediately following his college career, Sandburg became advertising manager of a department store and subsequently an itinerant salesman of stereographs. In the latter capacity he made frequent and extensive trips through the small towns of the East thereby acquainting himself still further with another aspect of American life.

The poet's literary interests led him at length to



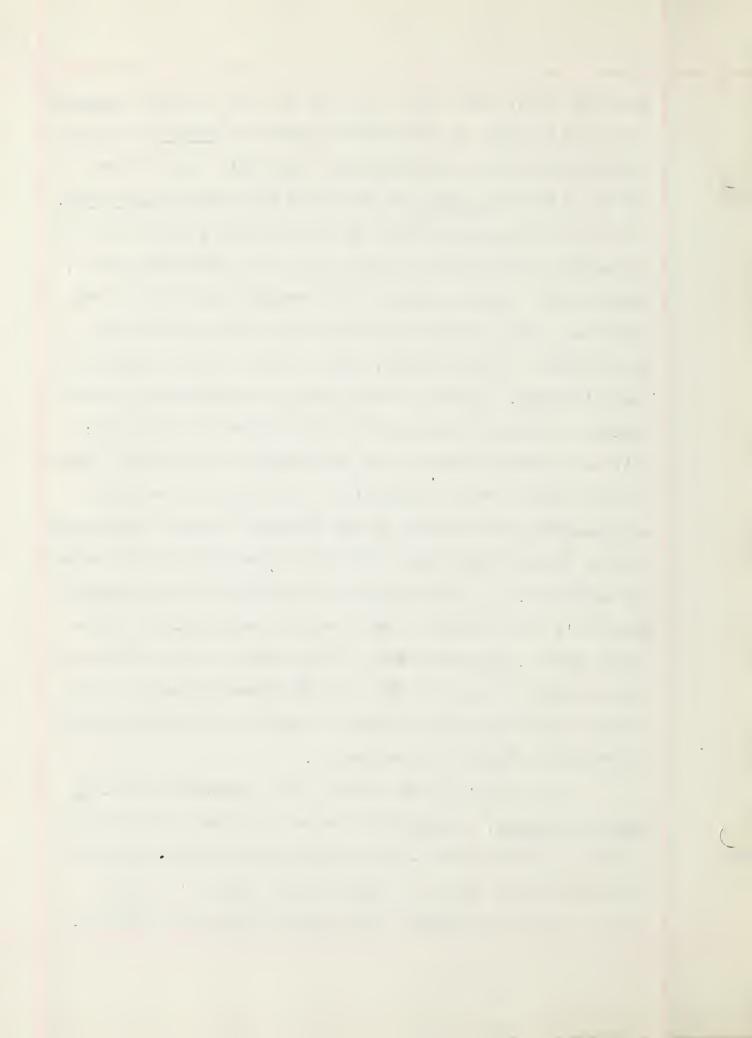
newspaper work: first, as a reporter for the lilvaukee Journal; later, as a member of the editorial staff of System, a Chicago magazine of business and industry; and finally as a reporter for the Chicago Day Book and editor of the Chicago Daily News. In all his newspaper work may be found the merm of his social philosophy - his interest in the lot of the american laborer. Sandburg felt for the worker a deep sympathy born in his own emperience, and he feared lest the worker become the victim of the machine. On the surface, there appears to be a parador in his philosophy. No one was more ready to acknowledge the usefulness, beauty and necessity of the machine than Schoburg: but, on the other hand, no one was quicker to denounce it when it destroyed or warped human life. The rights of property, said Sandburg, are guarded by ten thousand laws and fortresses; but the right of the worker to live by his work is still varue and undefined. In his work on the editorial staff of System. Sandburg's chief interest lay in safety campaigns for industrial workers. Characteristic of this phase of his writing are two articles written with his reportial accuracy and aptitude for the direct handling of facts - "Muzzling Factory Machines" and "Training Workers to Be Careful."

Sandburg's first printed work appeared in 1904. <u>In</u>

<u>Reckless Dostasy</u>, a pamphlet of verse and prose, presents the

typical Sandburg spirit - a profound sympathy with human suffering; sympathy with, for example, the "carryin' in boys"

working out their lives in the glass factories of Millville.



He protests against an industrial system that makes possible such labor. In "Pulse Beats and Pen-Strokes" he is the criticizer of the social order rebelling and predicting that

The hovels shall pass and the shackles drop, The gods shall tumble and the system fall.

With the publication of Chicago Poems in 1914, "a lanky galoot, with a bang over one eye, had finally arrived," as Alfred Kreymborg puts it. In this volume is strong evidence of the poet's loyalty to the poor, of his pity for the unfortunate, the downtroaden. Here across the pages march all the representatives of the work-a-day world of the city - teamsters, shovelmen, ten-dollar-a-week stenographers, factory orkers, and icehandlers. In the poem entitled "Masses" we find:

And then one day I got a true look at the Poor, millions of the Poor, patient and toiling; more patient than crags, tides, and stars; innumerable, patient as the darkness of night - and all broken, humble ruins of nations. 4.

"They will say" is a poignant protest against child-lawor:

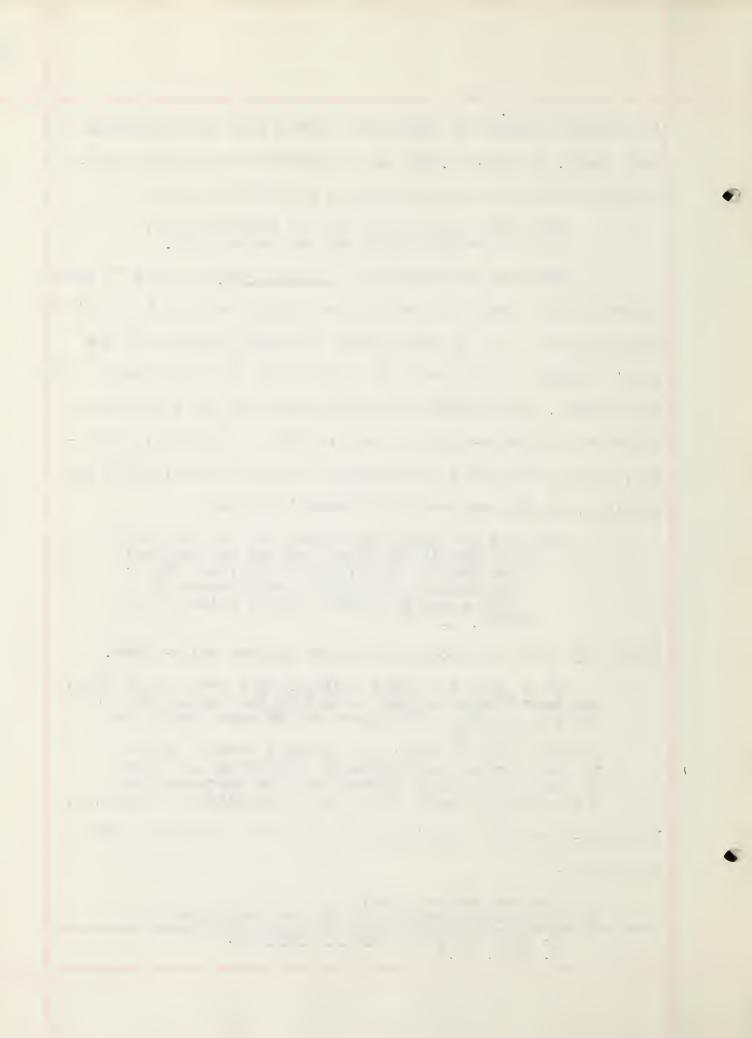
Of my city the worst that men will ever say is this: You took little children away from the sun and the dew, And the glimmers that played in the grass under the great sky,

And the reckless rain; you put them between ralls To work, broken and smothered, for bread and vaces, To eat dust in their throats and die empty-hearted For a little handful of pay on a few Saturday nights. 5.

In "Mill-Doors" the poet says goodbye to all those who enter there for -

how many cents a day?
How many cents for the sleepy eves and fingers?

4. Carl Sandburg, Chicago Poems, p.6 5. Ioid., p.9



And you are old before you are young You never come back. 5.

On the Halstead street car he sees "tired empty faces

Tired of wishes, Empty of dreams; 7.

in the subway

The worn wayfaring men With the hunched and humble shoulders. 8.

The dago shovelman sits by the roadped at the noon of his tenhour work-day,

Eating a noon heal of bread and bologna.

A train whirls by, and men and women at tables
Alive with red roses and yellow jonguils,
Eat steaks running with brown gravy,
Strawberries and cream, eclaires and coffee. 9.

There is the pathos of Anna Imroth, the factory girl, lying dead - "It is the hand of God and the lack of fire escapes"; 10. and of Mamie who beats her hand against the bars of her own frustration, wondering "if there is a bigger place the railroads run to from Chicago where maybe there is

romance and big things and real dreams that never go smash. 11.

And yet, in all the dust and grime and sordidness of Chicago, Sandburg finds beauty and he finds it in the lives of

^{6.} Ibid., p.10

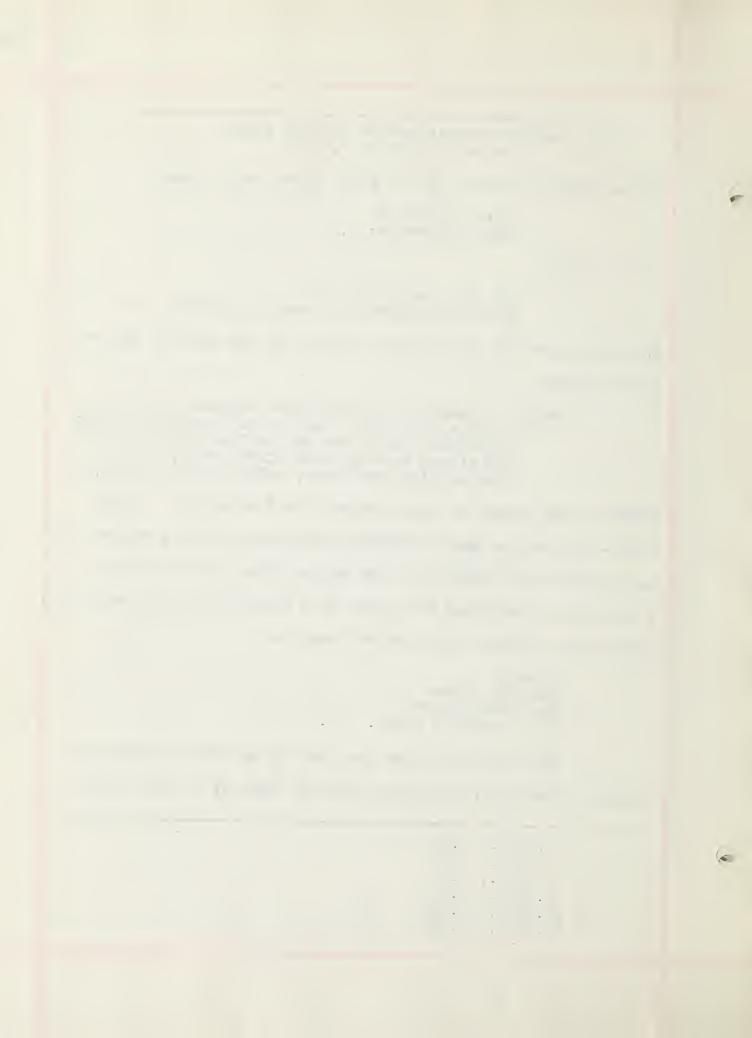
^{7.} Ibid., p.ll

^{8.} Ibid., p. 15

^{9.} Ibid., p. 24

^{10.} Ibid., p. 33

^{11.}Ibid., p.35



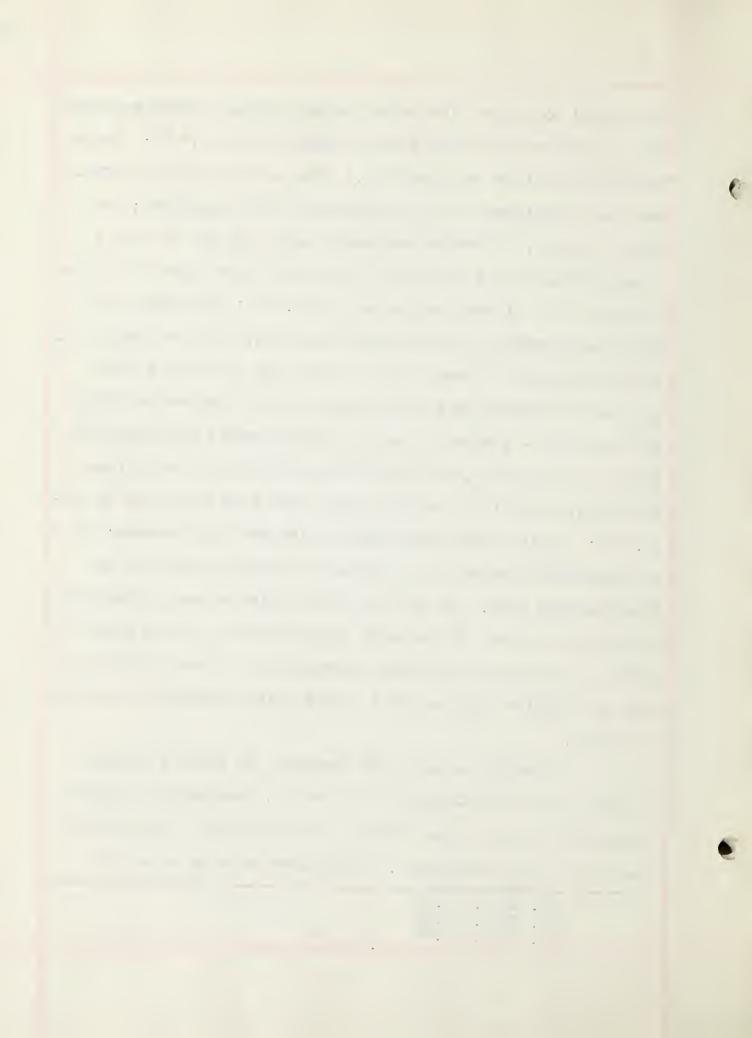
these very poor: the fish crier dangles herring before customers with a joy identical with that of Pavlova dancing." 12. He is "terribly glad to be selling fish." The poet questions professors and executives as to the meaning of true happiness: he fails, however, to receive an answer until one day he sees a "crowd of Hungarians under the trees with their women and children and a keg of beer and an accordion." 13. He dines with a butler millionaire, with an advertising man, with the mayor, all of whom claim to be happy; but the only man in Chicago whose happiness he envies is a little man with his jaw wrapped for a bad toothache - a maker of musical instruments "tho states the price in a sorry way, as though the music and the make of an instrument count for a million times more than the price in monev." 14. No, it is not work itself which Sandburg resents; no one understood better the salvaging joy and happiness to be found in hard work. It was the pathos which he saw in the poor working conditions, in the small reimbursement for the hours of toil, in the bits of happiness snatched from lives of drab poverty and squalor - it was this pathos which haunted the sociolorist-poet.

Lindsay, Hasters, and Sandburg, as poets concerned with the social well-being of the nation, frequently concerned themselves with the same problem, as for example, the women of the street, the prostitutes. The manner in which each poet

^{12.} Ibid., p.18

^{13.} Ibid., p.20

^{14.} Ibid., p.47



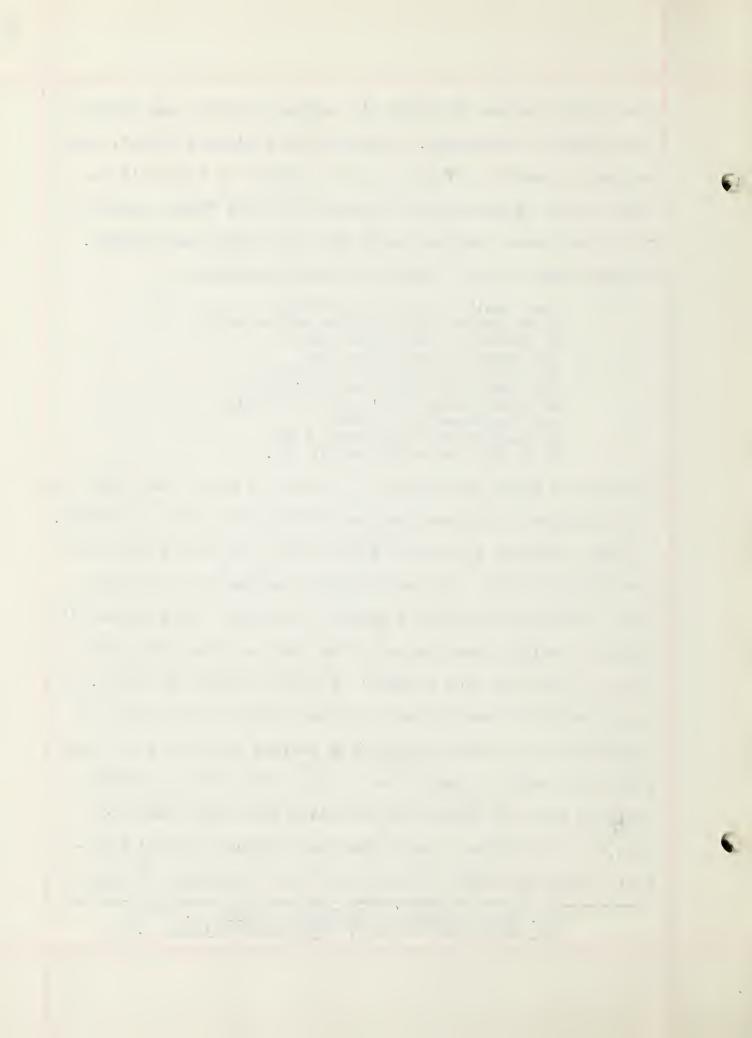
treats this subject typifies his work as a whole, and offers a good basis of comparison. Lindsay, the religious zealot, the reformer, wrote "The Trap," a vivid picture of the girls and women driven by ignorance and poverty to sell their bodies to the white slaves, who end their days in disease and despair. The poem ends with the justly indignant question:

What shall be said of a state
Where traps for the white brides wait?
Of sellers of drink who play
The game for the ertra pay?
Of statesmen in league with all
Who hope for the girl-child's fall?
Of banks where hell's money is paid
And Pharisees all afraid
Of panders that help them sin?
Then will our wrath begin? 15.

The work of Edgar Lee Masters is replete with men and women who have indulged in liaisons and ser relationships out of wedlock. In many instances his recret seems to be, not that society allows such to exist, but that society conderns so unfeelingly these attempts to satisfy a natural ser hunger. He does not, of course, justify prostitution but he does not challenge with a call to reform as does Lindsay; he simply states the facts. In his enumerative description of Chicago, "The Loop," there is reference to the fair girl-"a late recruit to those poor women slain each year by lust" - who buys fruit from a vender, while on the next corner the Salvation Army plays "Rock of Ages." Carl Sandburg treats the same subject, without Lind-say's reforming zeal, but with the coarse frankness of Masters

^{15.} Vachel Lindsay, Collected Poeus, 0.303

^{16.} Edgar Lee Masters, Sonrs and Satires, p. 32



tempered by a tenderness born of his own pity and spiritual strength. In "Poems Done on a Late Night Car," "It is Much,"
"Trafficker" "Harrison Street Court" and "Soiled Dove," there is infinite pity and regret for the "girls fresh as country vild flowers," 17. devoured by the Great White Vay; for the voman lurking on the corner, "smiling a broken smile from a face painted over haggard bones and desperate eyes." 18.

Like Lindsay and Masters, Sandburg wrote of var, of its futility, of the tracedy of fallen youth. Sandburg's characteristic pictorial skill brings before our eyes in "Yillers" sixteen million men,

Chosen for shining teeth, Sharp eyes, hard legs, And a running of young warm blood in their grists.

And a red juice runs on the green crass; and a red juice soaks the dark soil.

And the sixteen million are killing - - - and killing and killing. 10.

"Buttons," by virtue of its skilfull use of contrast, is unforgettable with its description of the lauching young man, "sunny with freckles," moving the buttons on the war map in front of the newspaper office; the last stanza:

(Ten thousand men and boys trist on their bodies in a red soak along a river edge,

Gasping of wounds, calling for water, some rattling death in their throats.)

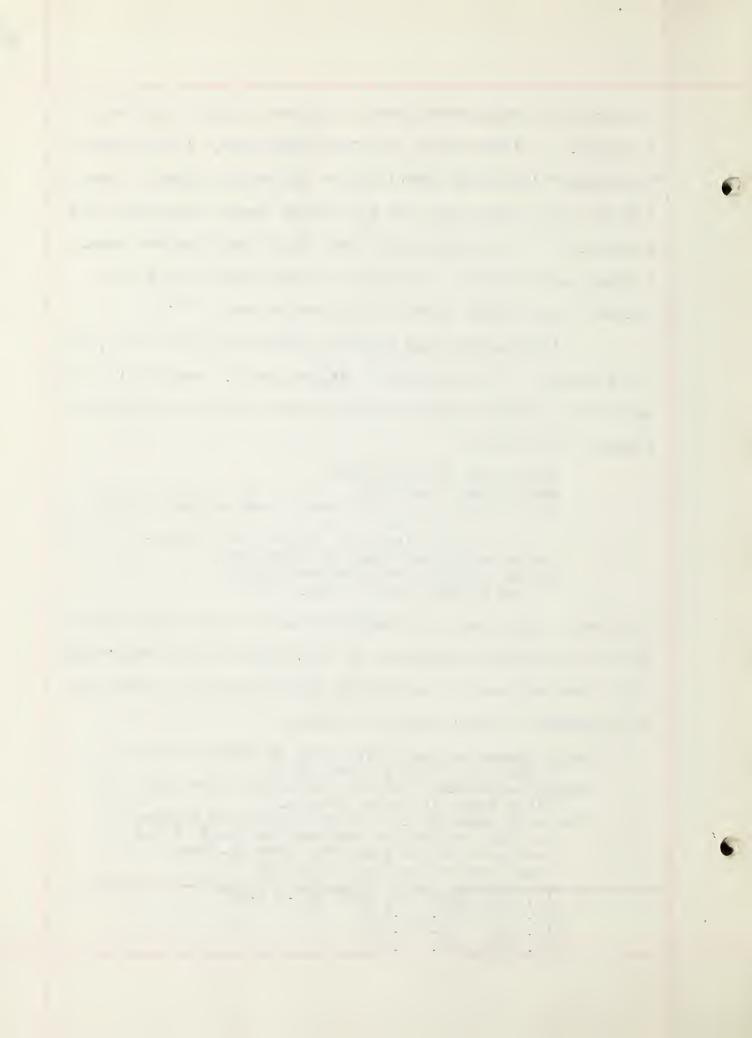
Who would guess what it cost to move two buttons one inch on the war map here in front of the newspaper office where the freckle-faced young man is laughing to us? 20.

^{17.} Carl Sandourg, opus cit., p.147

^{18.} Opus cit., p.151

^{19.} Opus cit., p.85

^{20.} Opus cit., p.92



There is not, in Sandburg's poetry, such bitter comment upon the social and economic forces behind war, upon "the war-makers," as in Lindsay's and Masters.' Yet in poems such as "They Obey" there is implied ironically the futility of a system in which those in command call, first, upon the soldiers, to destroy, and then upon the citizen-workmen to rebuild! And in both cases the commands are mutely obeyed. Sandburg does not have Lindsay's idealistic vision of a day when every ocean will "smoke the pipe of peace." He envisions, in contrast to past and present wars with kings quarreling and millions of men following,

In the wars to come kings kicked under the dust and millions of men following great causes not yet dreamed out in the heads of men. 21.

Is this a hint, perhaps, of a great world revolution with the "Masses" rising to ultimate victory?

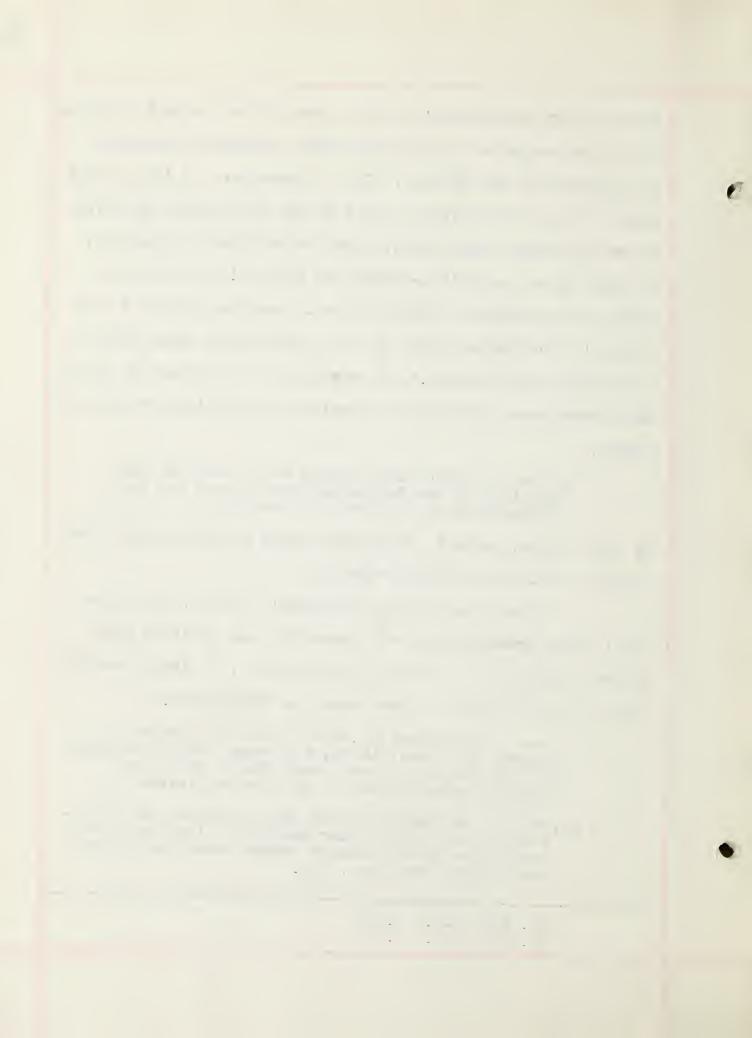
There is not in Carl Sandburg's poetry, as in Masters', such preoccupation with hypocrisy and graft in high places, although we do find, if not protest, at least recognition of its existence in such poems as "Government."

---- Government is human, made of heartbeats of blood, ambitions, lusts, and money running through it all, money paid and money taken, and money covered up and spoken of with hushed voices.

A government is just as secret and mysterious and sensitive as any human sinner carrying a load of germs, traditions and corpuscles handed down from fathers and nothers away back. 22.

^{21.} Opus cit., p.96

^{22.} Opus cit., p.173



Sandburg's love for the people, for the masses, led him to a natural dislike of a social system in which the rich erect fences of iron bars with steel points - "a masterpiece to shut off the rabble and all varabonds and hungry men and all wandering children looking for a place to play."

"The Right to Grief" brings sharp comparison of the millionate's "persumed sorror" for his dead child with the grief of the stockyards hunky for his dead daughter. The grief of the latter is minuled with the terrible burden of the funeral expenses and yet with a kind of relief that the doctor's bills are ended and now the rest of the family can have more to eat and to wear. There is grim pathos in such a situation and Sandburg feels it!

Sandburg, like Lindsay and Masters, is the poet of democracy. He shares Whitman's belief in the importance of the individual and he holds up Abraham Lincoln as his hero. Sandburg is the voice of the people become articulate.

I Am the People, the Mob

I am the people - the mob - the crowd - the mass.

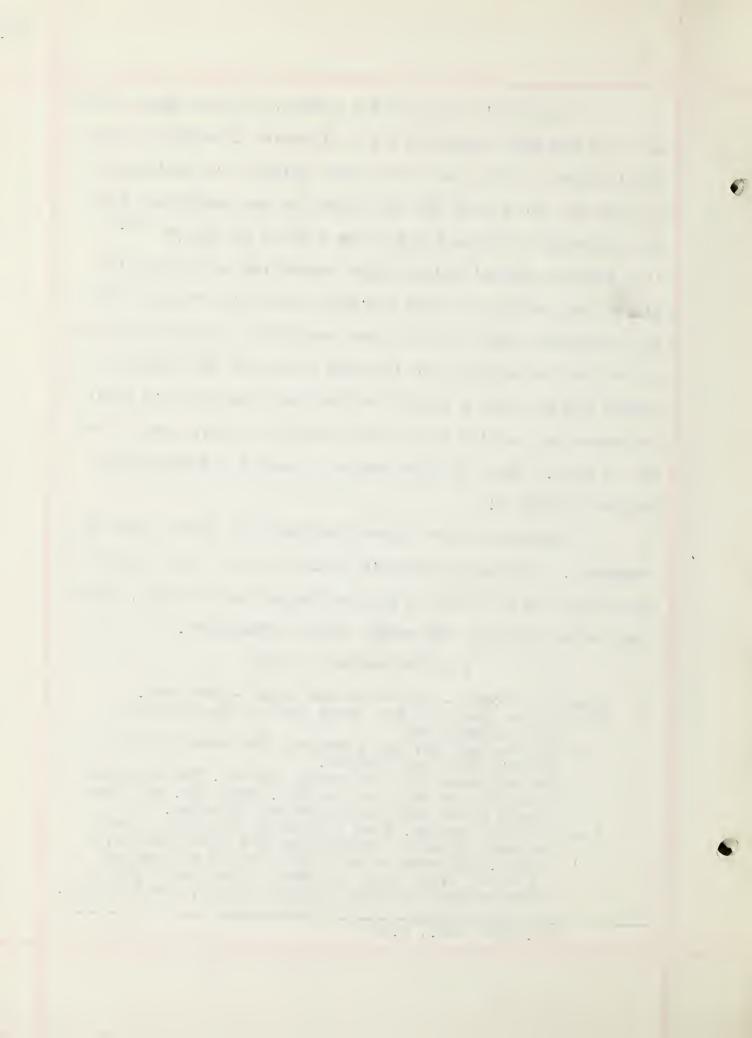
Do you know that all the creat work of the world is done through me?

I am the workingman, the inventor, the maker of the world's food and clothes.

I am the audience that witnesses history. The Mapoleons come from me and the Lincolns. They die. And then I send forth more Mapoleons and Lincolns.

I am the seed ground. I am a prairie that will stand for much plowing. Terrible storms pass over me. I forget. The best of me is sucked out and wasted. I forget. Everything but Death comes to me and makes me work and give up what I have, And I forget.

^{23.} Opus cit., p.32



Sometimes I growl, shake myself and spatter a few red drops for history to remember. Then - I forget.

When I, the People, learn to remember, when I, the People, use the lessons of yesterday and no longer forget who robbed me last year, who played me for a fool - then there will be no speaker in all the world say the name: "The People," with any fleck of a sneer in his voice or any far-off smile of derision.

The mob - the crowd - the mass - will arrive then. 24.

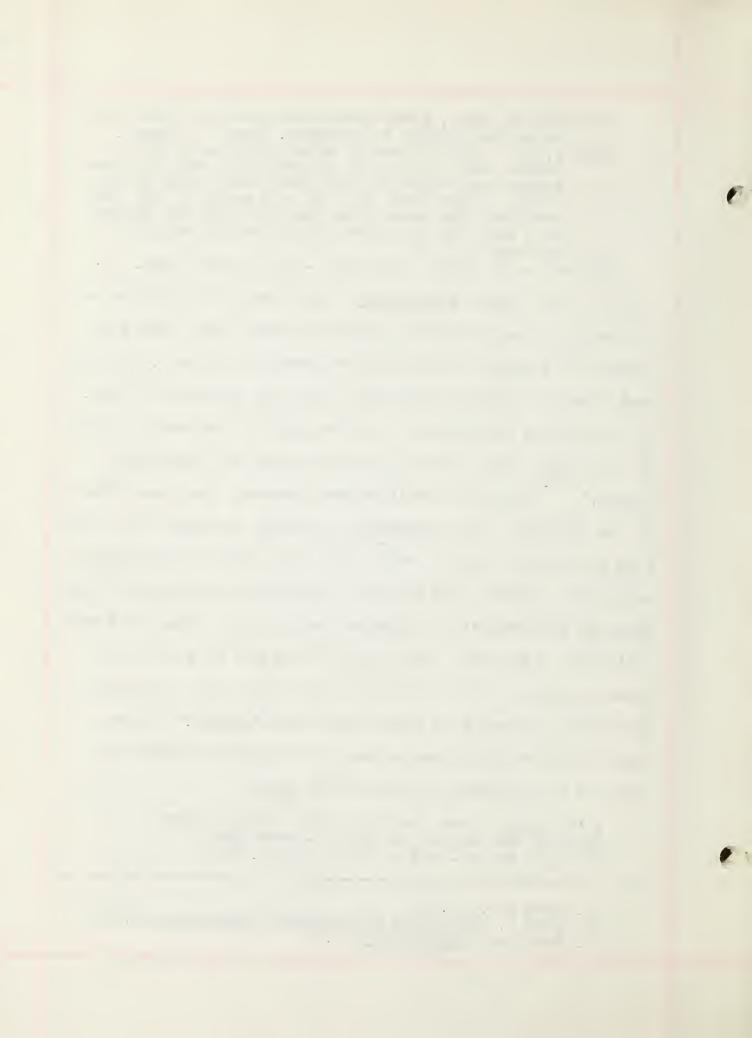
The volume Cornhuskers, published in 1918 takes us, in the title poem "Prairie" and other poems, away from the streets of Chicago to the broad eroanses of the 'est. Here the poet found the freedom and beauty which he demanded of life. "I was born on the prairie, and the milk of its wheat, the red of its clover, the eyes of its women, gave me a song and a We have in this volume, however, the same interest slogan." in the laborers - the farmhands, the wheat threshers, the railroad worker who lays the rails which run like a silver ribbon across the prairie. We find here continuing expression of the Sandburg philosophy: the ironical twist to the economic system in "Southern Pacific"; the pathos of poverty as seen by the parn-shop man in "Street Window;" the hypocrisy of nerspaper office and law court in "Polladiums" and "Lawyer." There is here a hint of his volume to come in "Prayers of Steel:" a spark of his optimism in "Caboose Thoughts" -

It's coing to come out all right - do you know? The sun, the birds, the crass - they know. They get along - and we'll get along. 26.

26. Sandburg, Cornhuskers, p.29

^{34.} Opus cit., p.172

^{25.} Fred L. Pattee, The New American Literature, p. 281



Reechoed	here,	too,	is	his	affinity	with	the	masses,	rith	the
poor:										

Testament

Let the namny goats and the billy goats of the shanty people eat the clover over my grave and if any yellow hair or any blue smoke of flowers is good enough to grow over me let the dirty-fisted children of the shanty people pick these flowers.

I have had my chance to live with the people who have too much and the people who have too little and I choose one of the two and I have told no man why. 27.

Smoke and Steel, 1920, carries the reader back to the factories. We see here, as some one has aptly put it, man-rade machines and machine-made men. The title poem is a vivid description of the building of cities through the blood of men.

Smoke at the heart of it, smoke and the blood of men. 28.

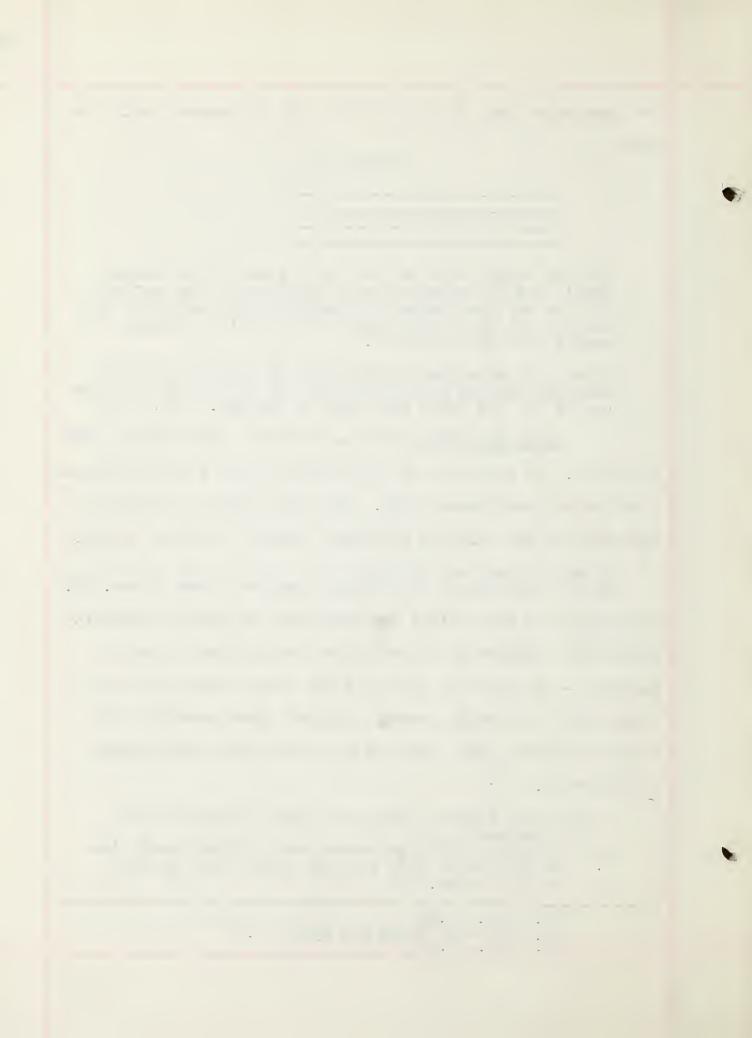
Outstanding in this volume is "The Mayor of Gary," a protest against the results of industrialism and another triumph in contrast - the Mayor of Gary in "cool cream pants" and white shoes, and the workmen "rearing leather shoes scruffed with fire and cinders, and pitted with little holes from running molten steel."

I asked the Mayor of Gary about the 12-hour day and 7-day week.

And the Mayor of Gary answered more workmen steal time on the job in Gary than any other place in the United States.

^{27.} Ibid., p.90

^{28.} Sandburg, Smoke and Steel, p.4 29. Ibid., p.25



"Go into the plants and you will see men sitting around doing nothing - machinery does everything," said the Mayor of Gary.

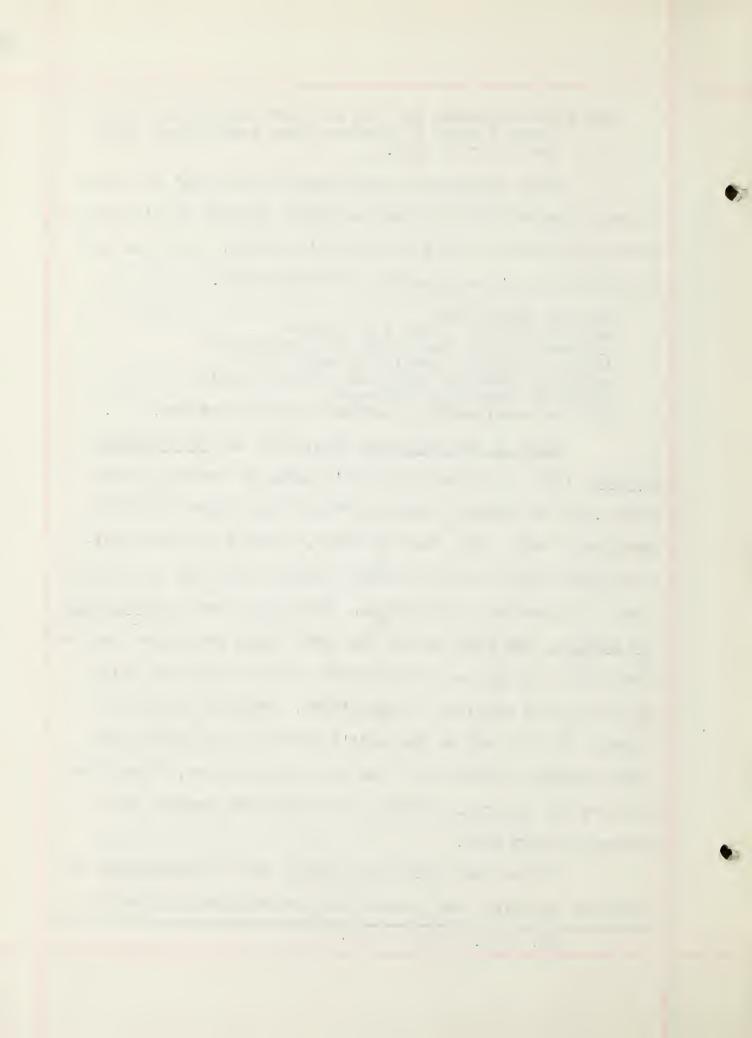
"Four Preludes on Playthings of the Wind" is a most effective presentation of the inevitable effects of time and an ironic portrayal of the fall of great nations. It is an anti-dote to a nation's complacency and false pride.

And the wind shifts
And the dust on a door sill shifts
and even the writing of the rat footprints
tells us nothing, nothing at all
about the greatest city, the greatest nation
where the strong men listened
and the women warbled: nothing like us ever was.

America, 1928, continued Sandburg's paean of praise of the people. In the former volume are "The Windy City" with its panorama of city life; "And So Today," ironic var poem celebrating the burial of the unknown soldier; and the title poem, a study of American dissolution. The title poem of Good Morning America, the 1928 Harvard Phi Beta Kappa poem, shows America developing through war and industry from her colonial origin to her present position of importance. Running steadily through all the work is the poet's faith in the people and their ultimate triumph, and the hope that America, though she may lose her material wealth, will retain her beauty, her dreams, and her soul.

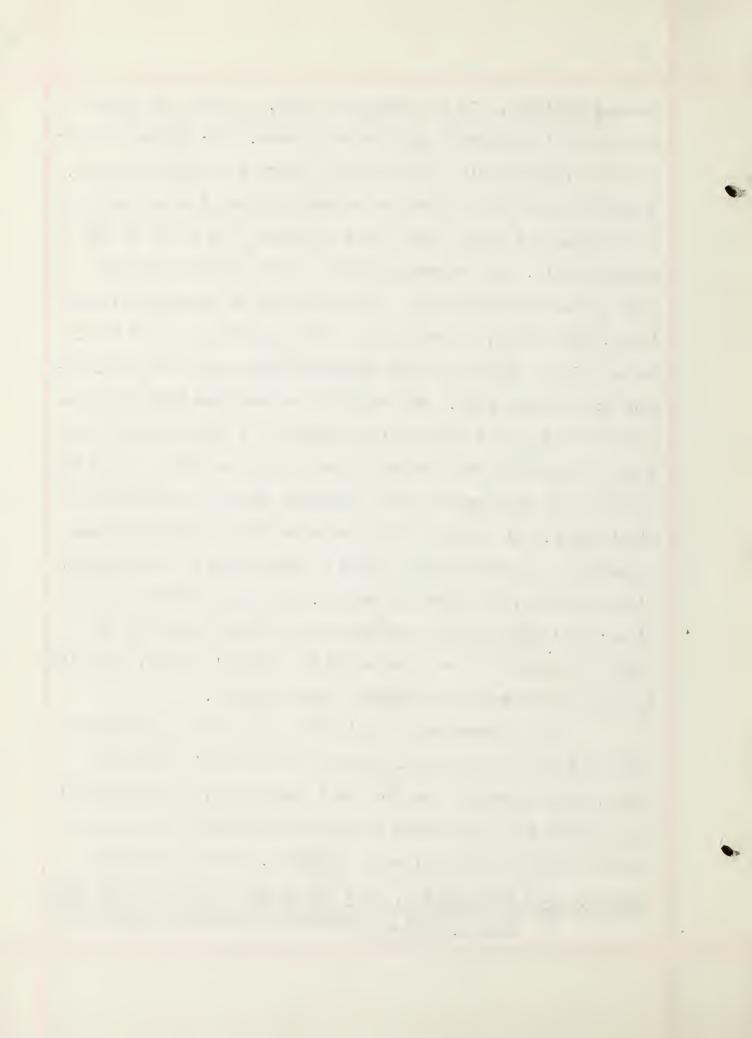
It has been said that "poetry can be judged only by its power to reveal and enlarge and intensify all kinds of

30. Ibid., p.75



human emperience. If it accomplish this, it does not matter that rules it breaks or what means it uses." Il. Judged by this criterion, Sandburg's poetry surely deserves a place of honor. Granted that he has broken the academic rules of versification. that he has put poetry into the vernacular of the man on the street, still, with superb artistry - with unfailing rhythm. with felicitous yord choice, with deft use of comparison, contrast, repetition, and symbolism - with skilfull use of every device of the artist, he has unfolded before our eyes every asgect of American life. He reveals this American life from the viewpoint of one of its working members, for Sandburg did not study his America as a member of one of its professions, as did Masters, nor as a professional wanderer through its states, as did Lindsay. He writes of what he sees with a profound human sympathy, with deep insight, with a fervor free of bitterness. vindictiveness, and personal satire. He rarely offers solutions; he simply paints conditions as he sees them, but he paints them with the warm color of the artist's brush, not with the cold photography of Hasters' candid camera.

Americans shall have a fair share of this world's material goods, that those who man the great machines of industry shall do so under fair conditions and shall reap their just proportionate share of the profits of industry. He is concerned secondly, and imperatively, that the people shall have not only John L. Steeney)



material goods, but moral and spiritual freedom and beauty. His wish for man is for "some rag of romance, some slant of a scarlet star." 32. He admits that the great body of people is better off today than it ever was. Books, music, pictures, travel more people are enjoying these things than ever before. He still maintains, however, that there is much left to be desired. To quote Mr. Sandburg: "Man does not live by bread alone. He has a soul. This soul imperiously asks to be fed. It wants art. beauty, harmony. For sweet sounds and forms of beauty and things that caress the eye and thrill the touch, it asks and demands. The people who are without these things are asking for them. Those who have them in degree are asking for more. - - -Up from the huts and hovels and sordid bedrageled shanties comes the cry for more. Let us feed our souls! For Christ's sake let us feed our souls! is the cry." 73. Whether this actually is the cry of the masses is another point. Sendourg is sincere in his plea for wider horizons for the people and he offers no solution ercept that of a democracy in which each man's worth is recornized, each man's place in the universe acknowledged.

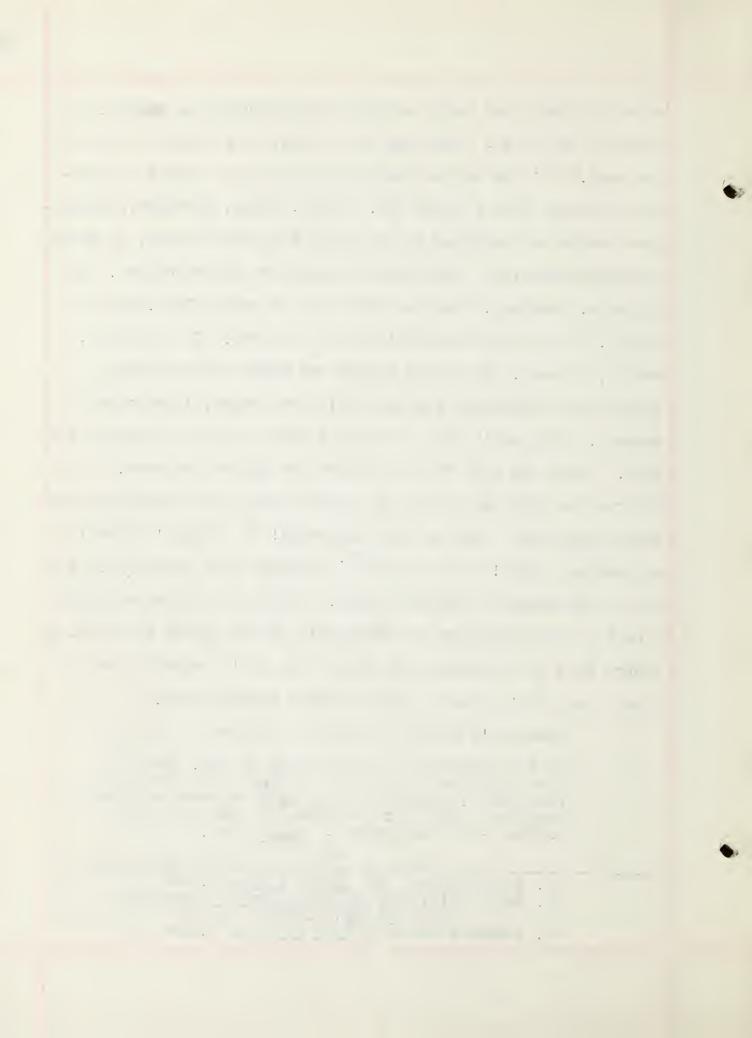
Sandburg's Prayer to Spirit of Truth

To thee belong all the children of men. Give them faith and simplicity in their dealings with each other. Grant that they look on each other as comrades, ready for laughter and love and work and good-will and belief. Amen. 34.

^{32.} Rica Brenner, Ten Modern Poets, p. 144

^{33.} Amy Lovell, Tendencies in Modern American
Poetry, p. 213

^{34.} Vernon Loggins, I Hear America, p. 274

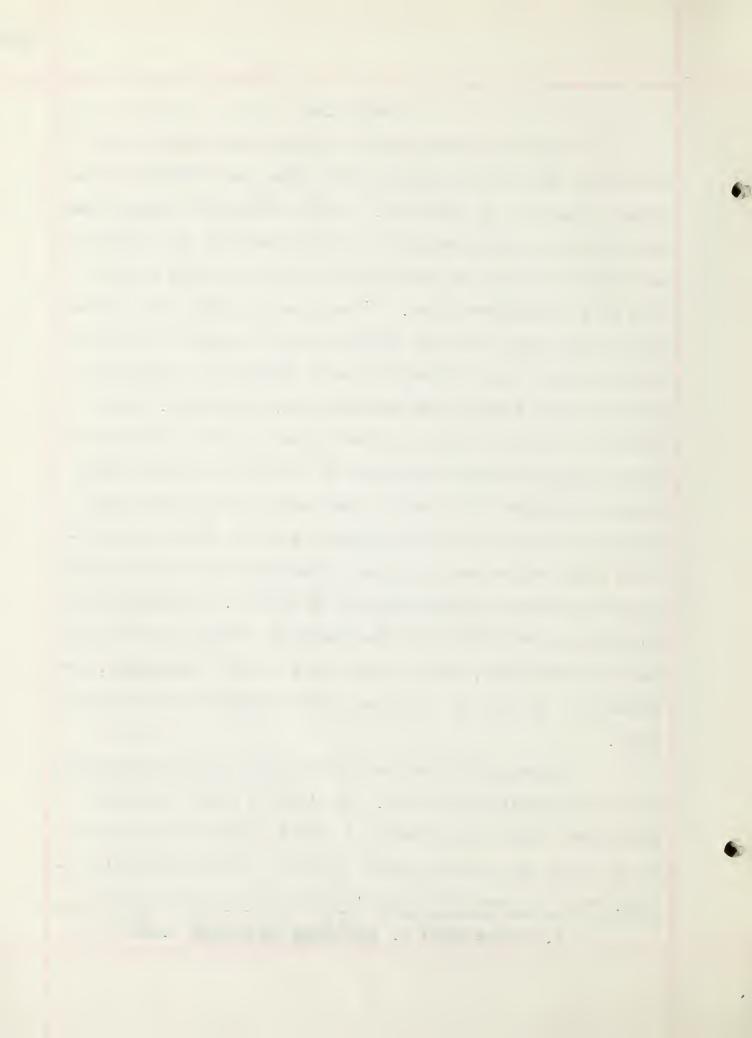


Conclusion

American poetry, since 1914, has introduced no personalities more significant than the three poets of Illinois -Lindsay, Masters, and Sandburg. Out of a rapidly emanding and developing West, they sounded a note of challenge to a complacent America "living an exemplary 3- meals - day and bed-time life in a wall-papered home." . Representing the spirit of an acricultural West which was decentralized, democratic, and individualistic, they typified the revolt a ainst the industrial East which was centralized, capitalistic, and feudal. They wrote in a period of American development when the old Puritan ideals and Anclo-Saxon traditions of culture and society were giving way before the force of a new order arising from the polyglot civilization of an expanding America. This was an interim - the era between the dissolution of the old ideals and spiritual values and the formation of the new. It was a period when America, satisfied with her material advance, was sitting back upon her heels, blind to her own spiritual stagnation. The country was in need of the recenerative stimulus of the Western poets.

Lindsay, Masters, and Sandburg were sincere champions of the democratic way of life. Socialist in their political sympathies, they simply desired to see the American democracy one in which each member benefited to the greatest possible extent. Firm endorsers of Whitman's philosophy of the supreme

1. Monroe, Harriet. Poets and Their art, p.224



importance of the individual, they could not countenance a democracy in which the weak were exploited by the strong, the masses crushed by the machine, and the poor devitalized by their poverty. The symbol which integrated their democratic hopes and ideals was the Abraham Lincoln who stated that "this country with its institutions belongs to the people who inhabit it."

Each of these three poets was concerned that American life should have more Beauty. Beauty, however, is an intancible term of wide connotation. In this instance, the quality itself and the method of achieving it are conditioned and differentiated by the personalities of the three men. Vachel Lindsay was an artist with a religious bent. He conceived, then, of Beauty's coming to America through a kind of artistic renaissance. As an antidote to the materialism and artificiality which he so deplored, he offered his doctrine of the ohysical and spiritual regeneration of home and neighborhood. Purity in private life he stressed as the cornerstone of a democracy's interrity. He optimistically envisioned an America re-created by the youth instructed in the Gosbel of Beauty. Edgar Lee Masters was a lawer with a capacity for thinking and living deeply. A realist, he made no pretense at reform; he simply stated his case at the bar and left the verdict up to his jury of American readers. At the heart of his philosophy was a keen love of life and the desire that every individual should have the opportunity to live to the fullest and to find happiness. He analyzed society as he say it, and he found it to be pre-

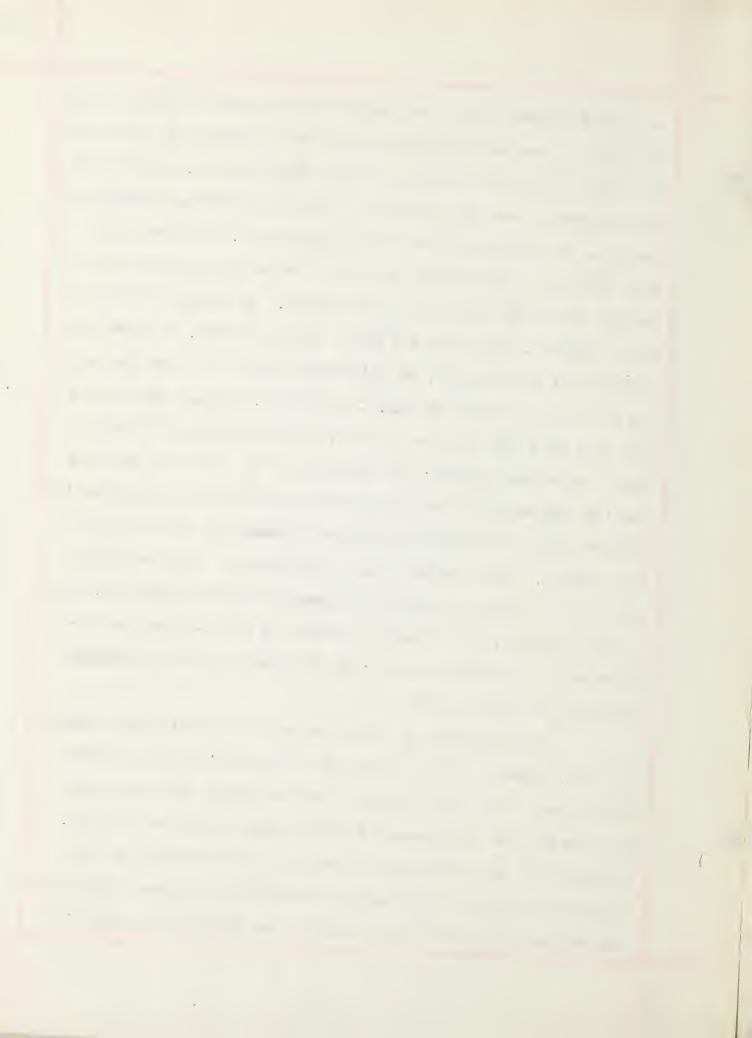


vented from attaining the summum bonum by the restraining bonds of an old Puritanism in manners, morals, art, and religion. The resultant tracedy in private life and hypocrisy in public life was the constant butt of his satire. That mortals should so waste the infinite riches which life has to offer was to him a supreme tragedy. Beauty of life in his philosophy meant freedom - freedom to respond to one's fundamental desires. He considered love - or ser expression - as the creative source of contentment, beauty, aspiration, and art. The "harmonious fruition of this universal need" - only too rare - he considered as further hampered by studia and unjust man-made laws and intolerant custom. By implication, then, we may assume that Hasters' society would find beauty when a strong wind of tolerance blew the veil from the self-righteous bigots who set up arbitrary if false standards of right and grong. Masters would sympathize, too, with Lindsay's crusade for the physical and soiritual improvement of the small town. Hany an inmate of the Spoon River graveyard lamented the hideous and demoralizing influence of an unly Spoon River environment. Masters would concur, too, in Sandburg's plea for a fairer distribution of material realth, for the creative soul of many a Spoon River resident had been crushed to earth by the force of economic circumstance. Carl Sandburg was a proletarian with the soul of a singer and poet. Sandburg, like Masters, was a realist, but his paintings of democracy as he saw it were touched with the brush of the artist. Concerned primarily with the rights of the

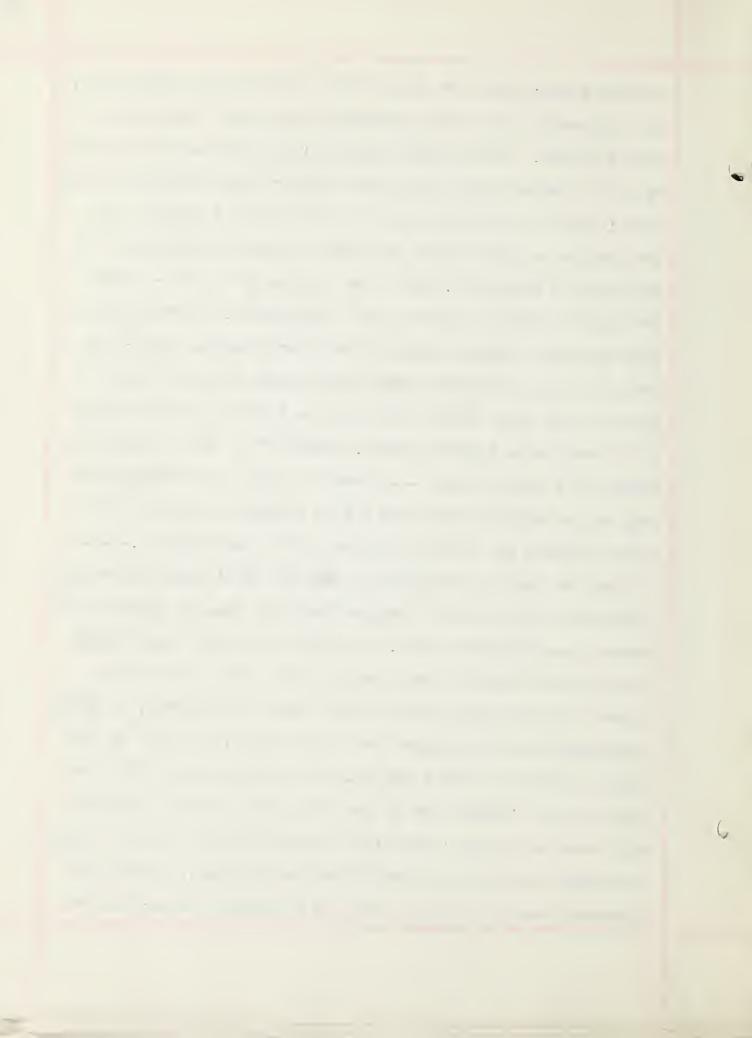
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so-called Common People, he lamented the economic system which returned to the laborer an unjustly low proportion of the profit culled from the machine by those who owned it. Implicit in his philosophy was the democratic belief of Whitman, shared by Masters, in the importance of the individual. He wished not only economic independence for every member of his ideal democracy, but also spiritual independence. He shared with Lindsay a belief in the need for more beauty in life. At once the champion of the machine, he yet feared lest it become the master and not the slave of man. The tramedy, to him, lay not in the fact that the machine existed, that industrialism crew. that the laborer worked; the tragedy lay in the fact that the machine was owned by the rich, that industrialism emploited the laborer, that the laborer worked so unceasingly and without just reward. Like Masters, he sought freedom for the individual - not, however, freedom to respond unrestrainedly to fundamental desires, but freedon to feed the soul - time and resources to enrich the spirit with the Beauty which a country such as ours has to offer.

The writings of these men may be dated; their ideals are not. Granted that the saloon of Lindsay's day is a thing of the past; still the cocktail bar has taken its place, and the crusade for temperance is needed now as much as in 1900. Granted that an increasingly intelligent application of psychology and growing tolerance of social customs have eradicated many of the problems which thwarted the freedom of Masters!



problem cases; there are still tragic misfits in private life, and increasing rather than decreasing craft and chicanery in public places. Granted that Sandburn's worker today has shorter hours, larger wages, and labor unions; there are still sweat shops: there is still an unfair distribution of wealth: capitalism has not yet mended her flaws to answer adequately the challenge of socialism. And we are now again at war - a war fostered by greed, hypocrisy, and selfishness. Certainly now more than ever America needs to make her democracy work: she needs the kind of Beauty these poets called for, the kind of Beauty which Glenn Frank identified as something that is born in the soul of a radiant people. "Beauty," he said, "cannot be bought by a rich nation; --- beauty is not just something to hang on the walls; beauty has a very intimate relation to the social content and social discontent of a commonwealth .----As long as there is something in men that will make them search for beauty, it is safe to assume that they can, if given a real chance, make democracy work. ---- Social unrest always finds its readiest recruits among men who have never been able to extract joy from their jobs or from their environment. It is an old observation that hungry men turn radical, but what we are likely to forget is that men with full stomachs may still be hungry with a 'hunger not of the belly kind, that is bahished with bacon and beans, but with a gnawing hunger for the things that make life free and adventurous and abundant. Maybe the statesmen have overlooked beauty as a campaign issue; for men



do not revolt against a government that is making their work and their lives and their environment beautiful. Beautiful homes, beautiful factories, beautiful offices, beautiful citics, beautiful landscapes, beautiful relations in business and industry; a community and state and national life that stimulate and satisfy men's hunger for beauty - these are the things that turn the energies of mankind from the ruin of revolt into the radiance of creative living. I suggest that beauty is better and cheaper than the big stick as an instrument for maintaining law and order and contentment and satisfaction."²

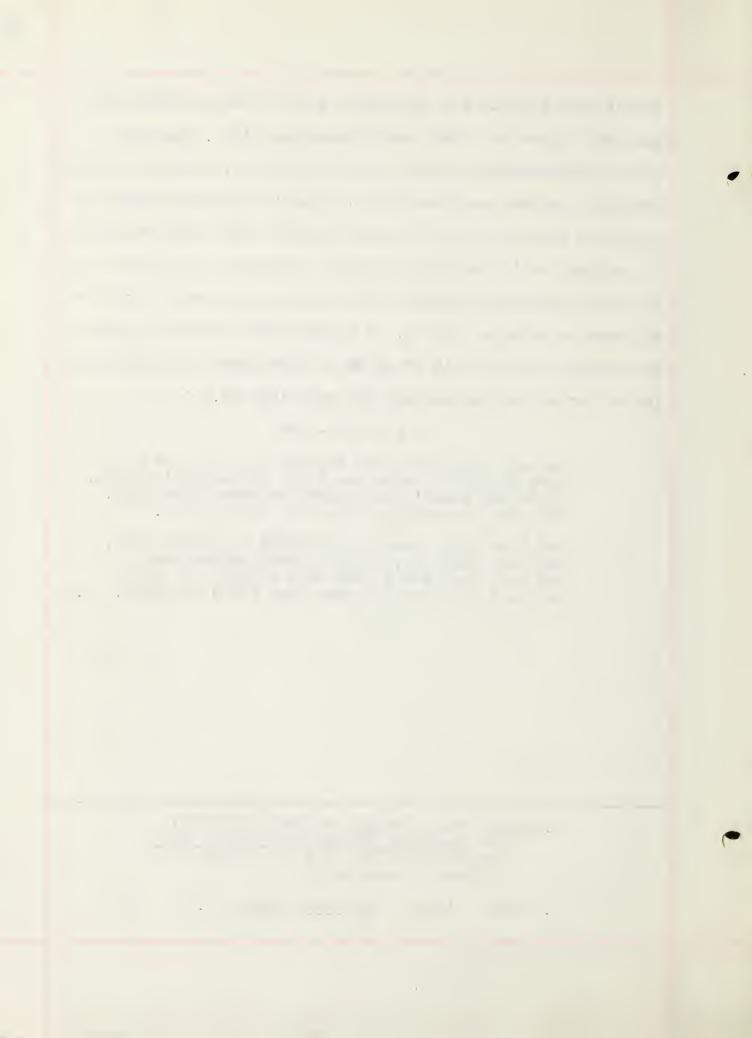
The Leaden-eyed

Let not young souls be smothered out before They do quaint deeds and fully flaunt their pride. It is the world's one crime its babes grow dull, Its poor are ox-like, limp and leaden-eyed.

Not that they starve, but starve so dreamlessly, Not that they sow, but that they seldom reap, Not that they serve, but have no gods to serve, Not that they die but that they die like sheep. 3.

^{2.} Glenn Frank, Beauty and Social Welfare (From American Forests and Forest Life Copyright, 1928, by The American Forestry Association)

^{3.} Vachel Lindsay, Collected Poems, p.69

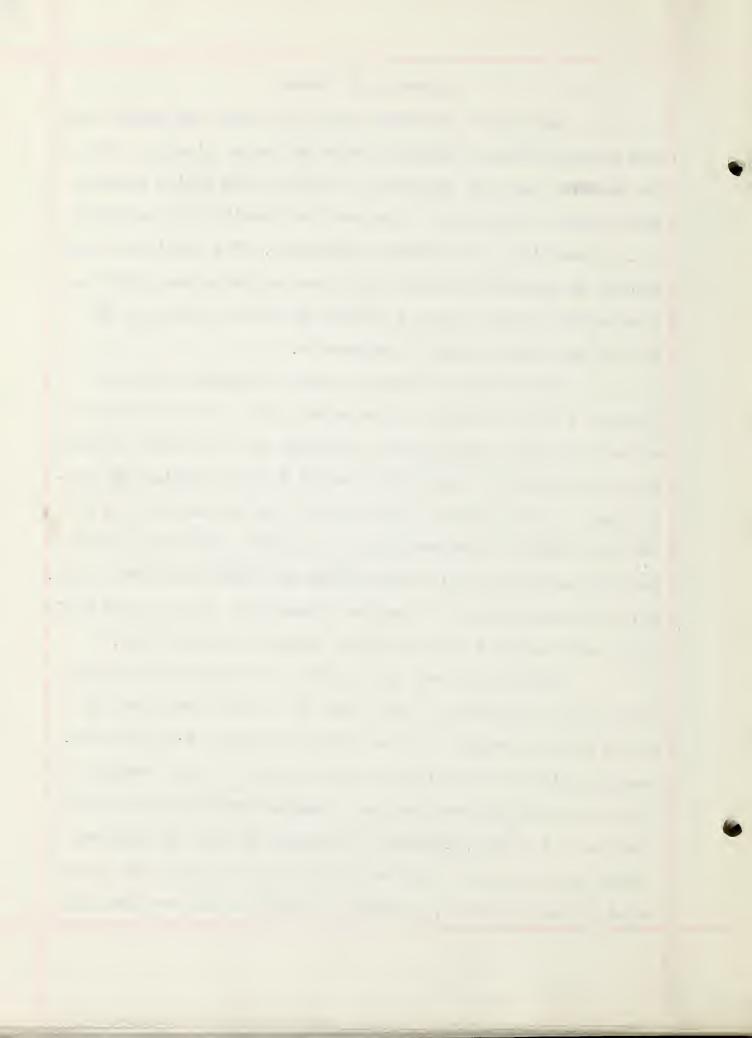


Abstract of Thesis

The purpose of this study is to trace the social and historical influences upon the works of Vachel Lindsay, Edgar Lee Masters, and Carl Sandburg; to examine the social philosophy of these poets; and to discover the ideals which motivated their conception of an American democracy. The thesis does not attempt to discuss the poetry from the aesthetic and appreciative point of view, but as a comment on and criticism of the life of the period which it represents.

The new note of social import in poetry had been sounded by Edwin Markham in the latter part of the nineteenth century with the publication of "The Man with the Hoe." Markham, one of the first to take up the cudgel for the vorking man, envisioned a social order in which every man was entitled to not only the material comforts of life, but also the things which beautify and ennoble life and develop the spiritual side of man. Walt Whitman, the bard of American democracy, took up this challenge and handed it on to Lindsay, Masters, and Sandburg.

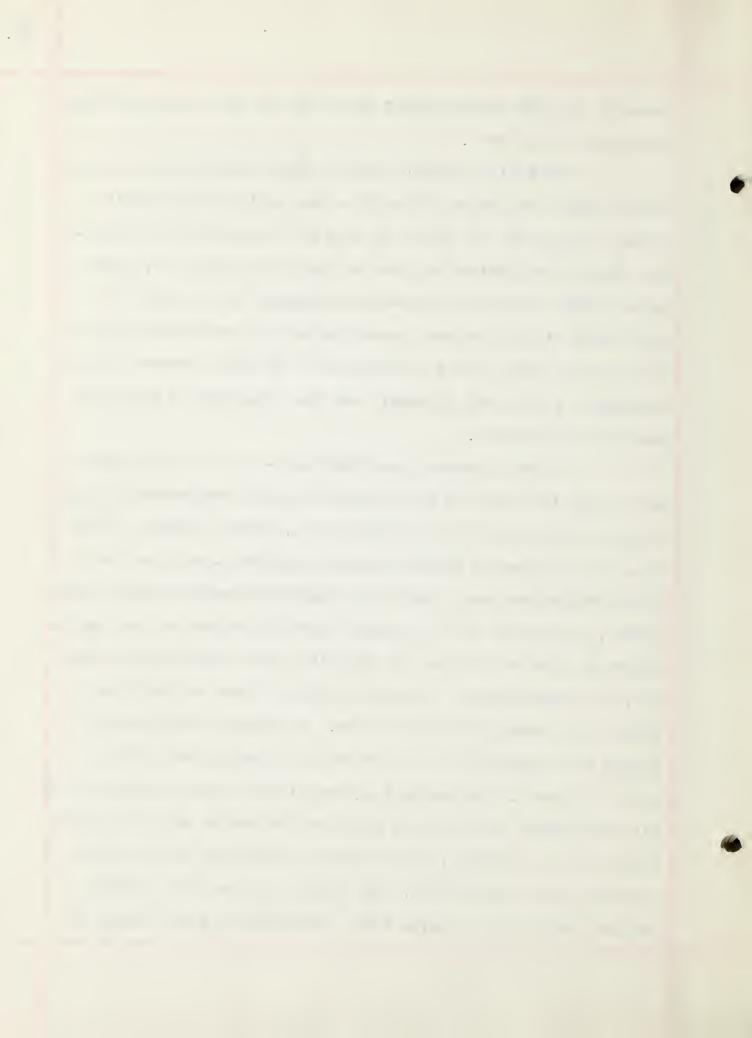
These three men, born within ten years of one another during the period 1869 - 1879, grew up in the latter part of the nineteenth century, in the period following the Civil War. American life at this time was characterized by the growing industrialism of the East and the expansion and increasing urbanization of the West. Conflict - economic as well as political - sprang up between the agrarian, democratic West and the industrial, republican East, reaching a climar in the presidential



campaign of 1896 which brought defeat to William Jennings Bryan, candidate of the Test.

The early creative work of these three poets had its birth during the period 1910-1920 - the period of America's outward expansion, of growth in national consciousness, of increasing industrialization, and of the first World War. Their later works reflect the post-war influences of the 1920's - the growth of big business, mass production, prohibition, collapse of old moral codes of behavior, a growing interest in the sciences - social and physical, and the decadence in religious and spiritual values.

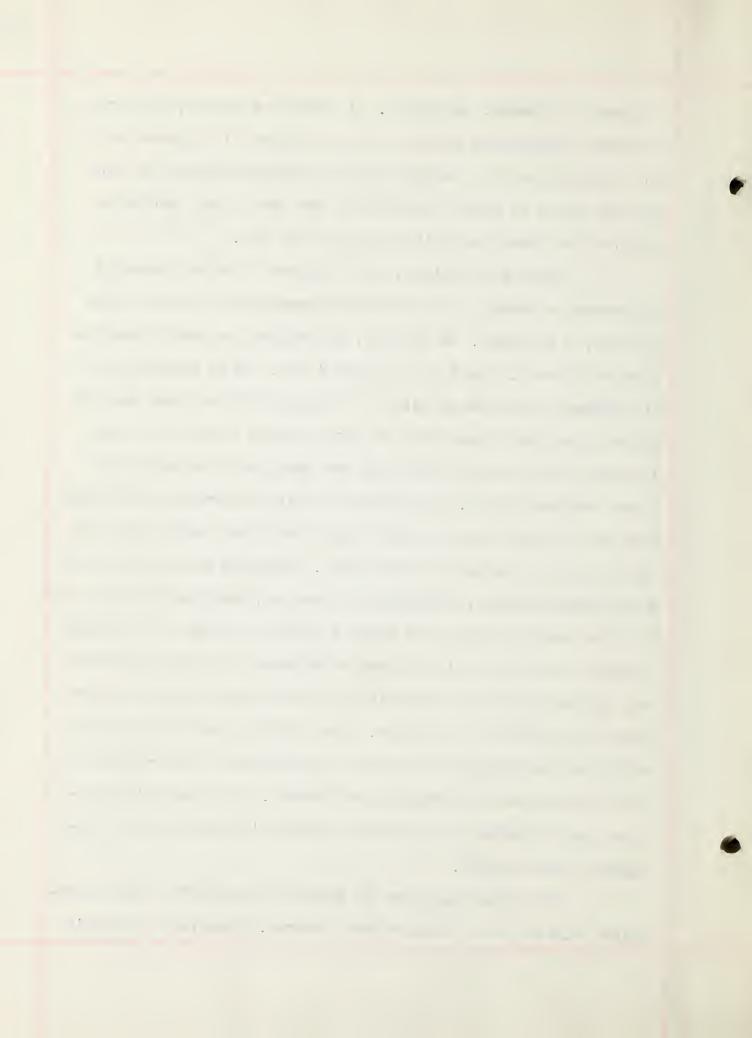
Lindsay, Masters, and Sandburg - all from Illinois were among the first in the so-called poetry renascence of 1914,
which had its origin in the Middle West. Vachel Lindsay - artist, poet, reformer, social radical, vagabond - combined religion, patriotism, and beauty in a philosophy which stressed the
latter. Perturbed at the growing materialism and at the spiritual starvation of America, he traveled afoot preaching his gospel, the new localism - beautification of home and neighborhood - as a means of social reform. He optimistically envisioned the rebuilding of his own city of Springfield into a
place of beauty. Concomitant Lindsay ideals found expression in
his anti-saloon crusade, his campain for better and more educational moving pictures, his efforts in behalf of racial tolerance and world brotherhood. The spirit of his ideal philosophy he found in his beloved West, incarnate in such figures as



Jefferson, Lincoln, and Bryan. A sensitive mystic, he often confused vision with reality, but in verses of vigorous swing and haunting refrain he pictured the various aspects of the America which he knew - especially the Mest - and protested against the greed and materialism of his day.

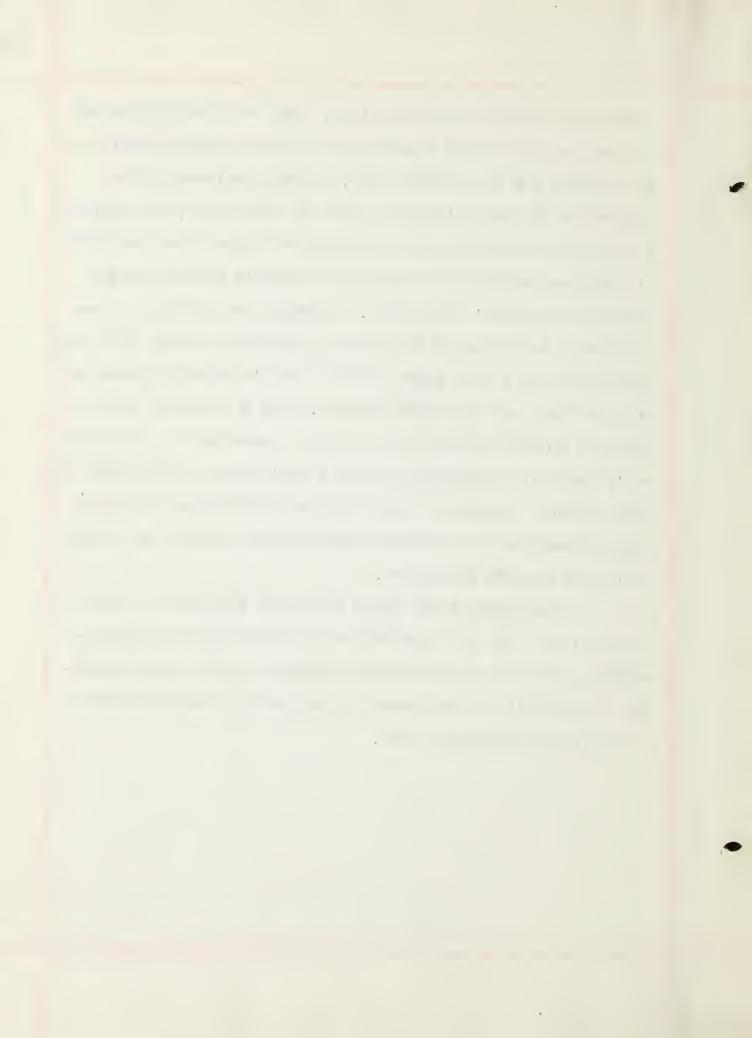
Edgar Lee Masters, like Lindsay a social democrat and avoved adherent of Jeffersonian democracy, was not, like Lindsay, a reformer. A realist, he painted the small Mestern town as he saw it, not as it ought to be. With sympathy for the cramped, monotonous life of the unly little towns and for those individuals oppressed by the economic system, he, too, lamented the lack of beauty and the spiritual stagnation in these American lives. At the core of his onilosophy was a keen love of life and the wish that each individual might have the opportunity to enjoy it to the full. Freedom to satisfy one's fundamental desires, unhampered by narrow, restricting man-made lars and social custom was a key to fuller living, he thought. Against narrow and self-righteous patterns of respectability and against creed and hypocrisy in private and public life he aimed the shaft of his satire. His thinking and his writing reflected the trends of his day - psychology, psycho-analysis, free ser-expression, Freudian philosophy. If Lindsay's democracy was synonymous with beauty, Masters' democracy was synonymous with freedom.

Carl Sandburg, son of Swedish immigrants, early identified himself with the American laborer. Champion of labor's



rights and fair working conditions, poet of industrialism and the machine, his great concern was that the machine should be the servant not the slave of men. Ardent believer in the importance of the individual rights of the people, he attacked the evils of society which denied these rights. He wished for his fellow-Americans the beauty of Lindsay's gospel and the freedom of Masters' philosophy. Strongly socialistic, he envisioned a day in which the Masses, the People should come into their own with a fair share of this world's material goods as well as moral and spiritual freedom. Not a reformer, he offered no solution other than that of a democracy in which each man's worth is recognized, and each man's place in the universe acknowledged. Sandburg wrote with an intelligence and logic which Lindsay did not possess and with the touch of an artist which was foreign to Masters.

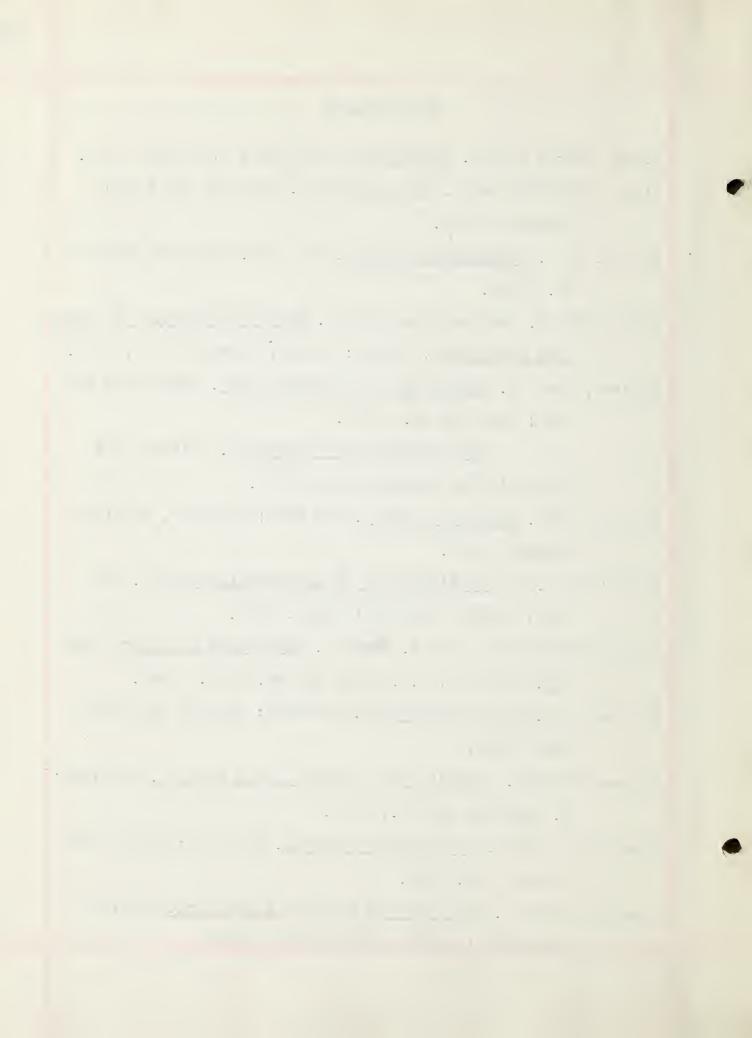
Democracy today might well heed the plea of these poets to put into the lives of every individual the Beauty - economic, social, and political; physical, mental, and spiritual - which will be reflected in the radiant faces of those who have seen Democracy work.



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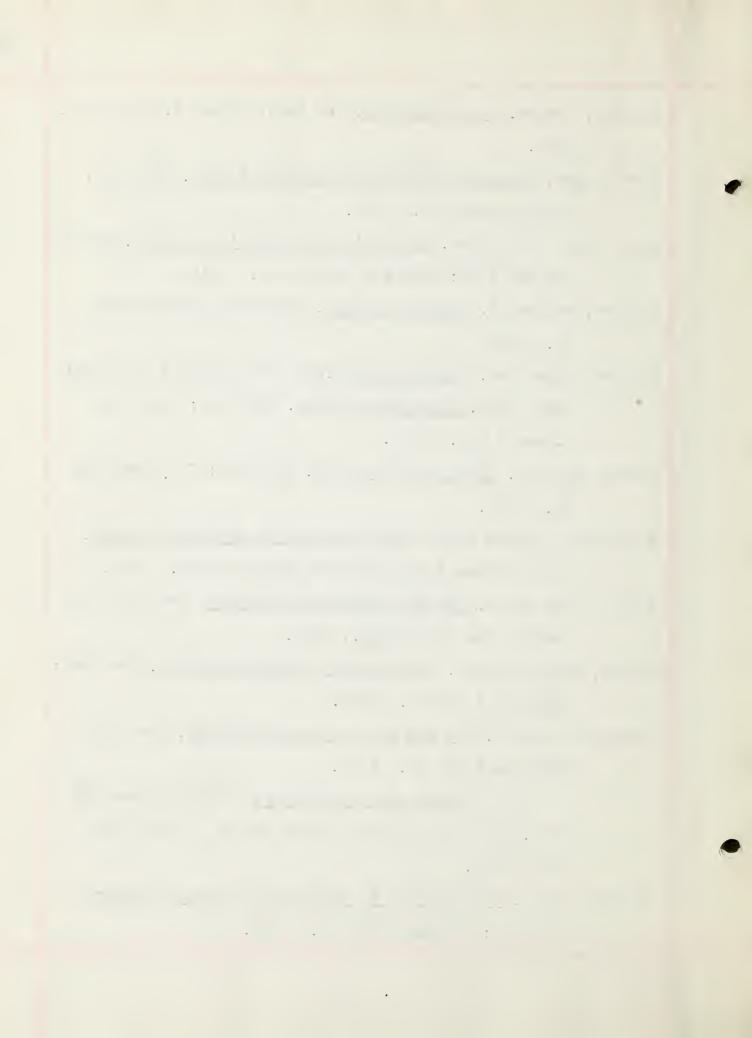


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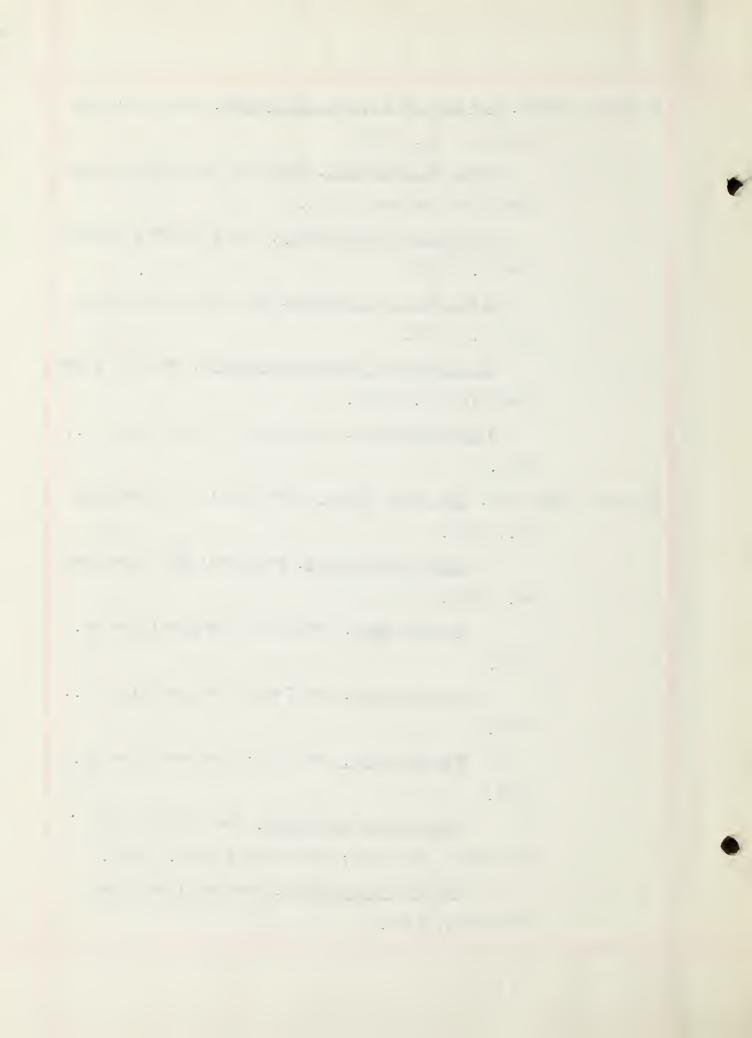
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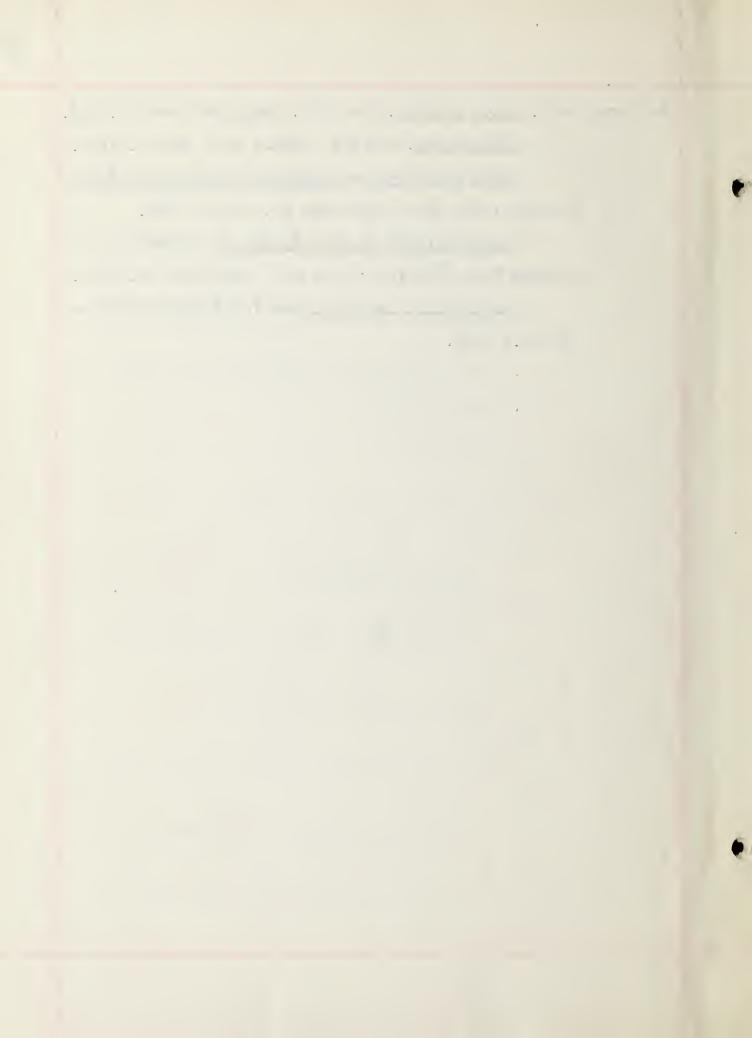
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